Whistle While You Work

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/916029.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Implied Past Abuse, Implied Past Rape, Collars, Ownership, Rope Bondage, Rimming, Oral, Emotional Manipulation, Hurt/Comfort, baths, believe it or not a rather happy ending for the both of them, and... Winston
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Nice Work If You Can Get It
Stats:	Published: 2013-08-07 Completed: 2013-08-22 Words: 35,172 Chapters: 3/3

Whistle While You Work

by orphan_account, whiskeyandspite

Summary

They tell Will Graham why he is there - that they know he's a fed, that they had seen where he was trying to do and what harm he intended - when they chain him to the heavy marble slab table. They leave him nothing, stripping him even of his glasses, and leave him defenseless at the back of the mazelike bath house, to learn his lesson on what it was to be an asset, rather than a hindrance.

This is the second part to the series Nice Work If You Can Get It. It would make a lot more sense if you have read that one first, however, if you just want some collar!kink, some deliciously submissive Will, rope bondage and manipulation on both sides then... you read right on ahead.

Notes

We promised, babies, and we deliver. Enjoy, for those of you who have been with us since the beginning!!~

We shall keep our new appointments on Thursdays. Stay tuned!

Chapter 1

He has been pulling strings for some time now, reaching out down the chain of his command and twisting until he could imply without giving any direct orders. Hannibal is very good at misdirecting the origins of an order, and he is confident that no amount of tracing will ever link this back to him through the famiglia.

So when Will Graham was taken off the street, the order came for all intents from up the foodchain entirely. The FBI agent disappears under the skin of the city, beneath where anyone would think to look for him for longer than it would take the FBI to worry that the man was dead and that they would have to seek him below ground. Long enough to make him belong to the Mafia with possession being nine tenths, at least. It's elegantly executed to remove a threat.

But Hannibal's hands appear clean. That is the most important part.

They tell Will Graham why he is there - that they know he's a fed, that they had seen where he was trying to do and what harm he intended - when they chain him to the heavy marble slab table. They leave him nothing, stripping him even of his glasses, and leave him defenseless at the back of the mazelike bath house, to learn his lesson on what it was to be an asset, rather than a hindrance.

Hannibal finds it unpleasant, likely filthy, but he has little doubt it will be effective, as he measures the time in his mind, when he has a moment to spare over the weeks that Will Graham is their prisoner. In the first, he is likely defiant and angry. Perhaps he tries to work the tight cuff over his ankle, rubbing his skin raw and resisting by biting and kicking until it was taken away from him, however they wound up getting him there. Hannibal had given very strict guidelines about his teeth and face and skin.

In the second week, he would be sullen and still trying to hold on, perhaps refusing to eat until the indignity of being fed ground that wall down to nothing - perhaps into the third, by which point the sporadic sleep fraught with constant interruption would be taking its toll, the helplessness. The fact that no one was coming for him and every time he looked up, there was a new stranger to take advantage of him.

It's not until the end of the fourth that Hannibal makes his move, on the hairline of Will's destruction. He appears at last, wearing a worried expression and carrying his coat like a peace offering, eyes dark and throat working in distress that was almost genuine as he 'discovers' William locked away - and he is an expert at this, at least. His expression conveys that he'd been seeking Will this entire time, that he'd been worried, feared the worst... and of course he had, but only now could he be helpful to the man.

Time crawls. After the first moment, when he was bagged and gagged and dragged away somewhere where smell and sound were his only useable senses Will stopped trying to figure out how long he’d been there. He hadn’t seen his kidnappers, hadn’t known anything about them beyond guessing that he had been found after the trial went awry. He’d expected as

such, but not as fast. He'd been packing to leave, burning his paperwork in the metal dustbin in the bathroom and then nothing. Black. A hit to the back of his head, a dirty rag in his mouth and that's it.

The first week is a terrifying miasma of hell and pain and blood. He isn't obedient, he refuses to be, but he can't fight beyond a certain amount and after the first few people he's just too tired. It's cold and dark and in the moments he's not watched, or used, Will is terrified. Because the flow of people never cease. He can't tell if it's night or day or if he's even alive; the only thing he knows is that if anyone comes near him he'll lash out. An instinct, a knee-jerk reaction. It doesn't do him favors.

Will is no longer sure what he's done by the time someone else enters the room; defiance turned to desperation and his fear has started eating him slowly from the inside. No one is looking. No one knows where to look. He isn't even sure he was still in Philadelphia . but these footsteps are softer, measured, something familiar about their rhythm and pace, but Will refuses to look up. If they want to see his face they'll yank his hair and see it. After a few weeks he's realized that even obedience is unacceptable here. He's suffering because they want to make him, not because of anything he does.

He's bruised and bloody, fairly sure he smells revolting and feels worse. He's cold. Eventually, when his eyes open – when the footsteps stop nearby and the anticipation is just too jarring – he can see clean expensive shoes in front of him and follows the tailored pinstripe pant up to the man wearing them. He's blurry, even beyond Will no longer having his glasses, it's too dark in the room to see much. Nonetheless he flinches a little when the man moves, pushing himself to sit and then back until he can huddle against the wall.

He's the first today. Won't make him the easiest.

It's worse than he expected, Hannibal calculates. He had expected terrible - Will had deserved worse in the eyes of his compatriots. It would be true, when he told William later that this was the only way to save his life. It required a certain reduction in status, a certain and rapid downward descent that was the only thing keeping Will Graham above ground. He isn't sure, at this moment, that William would count that as a blessing.

"William," he says, softly, and he doesn't have to fake all of the concern - the sunken eyes are unfocused and dark in their dark sockets, and Hannibal is careful not to venture forth any of his limbs into threatening range. If the man fights him, he will keep fighting, Hannibal thinks. This will have to be done very delicately. Hannibal sinks down out of range, and looks across the space, with his own eyes dark and wet. "I thought you were dead."

Perhaps he could have been. Hannibal had been so inconvenienced by the man that were his hold even a hair more tenuous over the organization than what it appeared to be, he would never have been able to reach out even from custody, and keep Will Graham alive. This was a very specific sort of revenge - he wanted to own Will Graham as thoroughly as the man had sought to own him.

He offers his coat instead of his collar, rising to his feet now that he'd identified himself, and he settles it carefully over Will's shoulders - it's the first clothing, the first warm covering Will's been allowed since he'd been taken from his hasty packing.

Will pulls the coat around himself and it takes all his willpower to keep breathing evenly, to keep breathing at all, when all he wants to do is sob like a terrified child and beg for this to be over. for all their training and teaching, the FBI were but words; words that could not and did not prepare Will for something like this. It takes him a long time before he can do more than lick his chapped lips in preparation to speak.

“I might as well be,” he rasps quietly, keeping his eyes down. He doesn’t want to know if Hannibal is responsible for this, strangely realizes he doesn’t care as long as the man can get him out. perhaps he can make a deal, somehow, get out of here, change his name, change his everything, and leave. Go to the west coast, even leave America. Fiddle of gold against your soul, Will Graham.

“How’d you find me?” he asks after another long pause, when it’s obvious Hannibal hasn’t come here for the same reason man after man had come in before him. it’s a relief, really, Will remembers their time together well – when he allows himself to remember – and he doesn’t want it tainted with something as filthy as this, as him.

All he can give the man is patience, as he gathers himself. Hannibal displays his palms open and unarmed before he reaches down at last to examine the cuff holding him to the table, the chaffed and torn skin beneath it, and he made a noise that was regretful agreement.

"You aren't, however," Hannibal tells him, looking up again to make what eye contact he can get. He was alive, and Hannibal knew he'd reached him before that would be a weight forever rather than a boon. His timing has always been excellent. He looks around the room as if expecting anyone to enter, as if furtive, before he produces a small metal set of picks from his pockets and begins to work the lock.

He doesn't stop his work when he looks up at Will Graham. "I refused to stop looking until I found a body, Will. I was worried that was what I would find." He sighs, softly, and the air pushes against the raw skin of Will's ankle before the first pin clicks and he gets to work on the second tumbler. "Why didn't you tell me what you were, William? I could have stopped this."

Will has long ago stopped assuming the best in situations, and when Hannibal starts working with the lock his first instinct is to jerk away, protecting himself or the man that came to offer him comfort, he hasn’t yet decided. But it’s futile, Hannibal keeps working and Will can do nothing more than curl up under the coat closer to himself as he does.

He realizes that on some level he is grateful that Hannibal never found a body. Much as he’d cursed everything and begged any entity that would listen in the last few weeks for death, he is very happy to be alive. Being alive implies he can escape and get away. Run. Just run.

“If you had known who –“ he swallows, tilting his head a little as he remembers the words hissed into his ear during the endless torment of the earlier weeks, “What I was,” he corrects, words clipped, “You would’ve shot me. or, perhaps, sold me here anyway. I will admit, I enjoyed the suits while I had them.”

The attempt at humor falls short and Will’s brows furrow in a mixture of pain and terror; Hannibal’s still working on freeing him. He won’t get him out of here alive, Will doubts he’d

be allowed to be walked out of here unless… he blinks, lifting his head to regard his former employer – perhaps former lover, if he were to go that far – and his lips part.

“Why are you here?”

Hannibal is hurt, when he looks up from his work to meet Will's eyes at the suggestion that he would have shot Will or harmed him. In a way, it does hurt to be underestimated so much, but instead, he just shakes his head and clicks the second tumbler into place, before sinking the lockpicks deeper to work the third and last.

Even the attempt at humor is fragile, Hannibal finds it brings him genuine relief. He hadn't expected that, even given their past and how carefully he had cultivated William into his care. He hadn't been given any choice but to turn it around from a careful coaxing to this blunt tool, when William had visibly betrayed him. This was as much a necessity as it was an orchestration, and Hannibal has to balance as carefully on it as William had when he'd first been trying to slide in.

"To get you out," he answers, and he wrenches hard enough to break the pick set, but the cuff springs open at last anyway, though the snapped pick jumps in Hannibal's hand against his other and opens a line at the back of his thumb that he hadn't expected. He lifts it to his mouth and pulls the blood away. "As much as I can, anyway. To protect you."

That's not utterly a lie. Will Graham's life was forfeit, now that he'd made his play and failed. The FBI had already ceased searching for him, they would not blink twice when they found a body. The Mafia wanted him dead as a lesson for others, and the only thing that would suffice to keep them away was the protection of someone as powerful as Hannibal, and the suggestion that where he was might almost be worse than death. His life existed right now in a limbo, and until he walked out of this place under the wing of Hannibal's protection, he was in a Schrodinger’s predicament.

Will tries, he tries to smother the spark of hope at Hannibal’s words. Protect. Perhaps he’d earned more from the man than he’d first anticipated. Maybe he could get him out, get him away. He had the power to, the means… and no one had to know. Will was as good as dead down here, and most likely, had Hannibal not come today, he would be within a week or two; there was only so much suffering a body could take before the mind implemented extreme measures.

He still watches Hannibal warily as the man moves near him, watches as he cuts himself and quickly sucks the blood away, as though it’s nothing, not a problem or hindrance. He swallows.

“No one’s left,” he tells him, though he’s certain Hannibal already knows, “Not unless they were in a body bag or made exclusive.”

And the sickening feeling is back, the strange terror that if Hannibal isn’t here to kill him he’s not here to save him in the sense Will is hoping for. But he shuts that aside too, for the moment, with the hope, the two battling with a nauseating fury in his chest.

"No one from your agency is left," Hannibal corrects him very gently, to remind him that there is a collective memory. He takes a deep breath, a sigh, and straightens, gets up to his feet, and offers his bleeding hand down to Will to help him up to his feet. "But the family has a long memory."

He sighs, clearly regretful. "I can protect you, William. But only if you're close."

That is true too. He can protect Will Graham and himself, and keep what he has come to find a very entertaining diversion, so long as the other was close. He had no interest in protecting him should he chose to run forever, and he would never make it out of the city if he rabbited. Perhaps Hannibal would strike him down from behind before he made it out of the room, if the instinct rose up in him like a snake striking, but he doesn't want that.

What he wants is Will Graham to come into his protection - to curl against his chest and into his arms and allow himself to be protected now that he was just the right amount of broken to be pliant enough to suit Hannibal as a diversion for far longer than any had before.

Will watches him, careful, wary, exhausted, and just wanting to trust, to take his words at face value. After a moment he takes the hand and gets to his feet, keeping the coat around his shoulders with his free hand. He’s unsteady and doesn’t let Hannibal’s hand go when he’s upright, something about the warm, human contact that doesn’t involve blows or being held prone and in agony by another person is almost unsettling in its normalcy. And despite himself Will sobs, a quiet, dry sound, before stepping close and resting his head against Hannibal’s shoulder.

He’s holding the breakdown at bay as much as he is able, but he doubts it will be long before the floodgates open and he’ll be lost. He squeezes the man’s hand like a lifeline and doesn’t let himself think. Just lets himself understand that he is no longer chained, that he’s covered, that he’s getting warmer, and that the man in front of him has been looking for him, seeking to find him and protect him.

And that’s enough for now, that knowledge, that naïve, stupid knowledge that’s keeping Will teetering on the edge of strength and complete mental collapse.

Something deep in Hannibal twitches to sudden, coiled life the instant Will settles against him of his own choice. It's arousal in a way, the way it wakes electric and writhing as Hannibal settles his arms around his prize and pulls Will against him to soothe - it's alright to let it go, it's alright they would walk free. Hannibal would make it happen. The transformation from a wary, beaten creature that was a threat to everything that dared too near because no hand had settled on him but to harm in too long - to something soft and surrendering in Hannibal's arms is alluring and perfect. It's a moment exactly as Hannibal had orchestrated, and as always, William delivers to him.

That's why the man is still alive, ultimately. Because he delivers himself to Hannibal so beautifully, even when he's shaking against Hannibal's shoulder and the half circle of the arm Hannibal has settled around him, their fingers gripped together in a way that is desperate and so tense as to almost be painful.

"It's alright," he soothes, gentles over the man's nerves as best he can. "No more, it's alright." It was far from that, likely it never would be quite alright again, but for the moment it was better than it had been, and Will was alive, he was protected. "We can go," he promises, but he doesn't rush Will - he wants the man to be able to walk out with his head up and his eyes clear. Hannibal knows that giving that much to Will is the best chance he has at utter devotion, when combined with all his other holds.

It takes time, more time than Will is going to admit, but time to get his breathing settled, to push the tears back far enough to be held at bay for a time when he's alone and can muffle the sound into a pillow. And he pulls away, letting Hannibal's hand go, and doesn't meet his eyes again, instead taking the time to slide his arms into the sleeves of the heavy coat and pull it around his body, covering as much of himself as he can, as much of the bruises and dirt.

He offers a small nod, an exhausted and resigned gesture, and sighs before swallowing and raising his chin. His eyes are still down and he's huddled under the coat appearing smaller than he is – habits learned quickly in the semi-darkness of the hell he's been in – but he's standing on his own and he will leave the same way.

He follows as Hannibal leads, passive and quiet but refusing to believe he's been broken. He wasn't. he was just lucky enough to be rescued, protected, remembered.

Hannibal finds, as he leads Will Graham back through the maze of narrow corridors and down steep steps to get them back out again, that he hadn't been quite ready to let the man go yet. It was probably better to get them out of here before he indulged again, however. Some place where it could play all the way out, and where he found it easier to remind himself to take it slow.

Before they emerge into daylight, Hannibal reaches out to stop William with a hand on his shoulder, gentle. From a pocket in the coat the man is wearing, he produces Will's glasses, so that when he stepped free he could do so into a world that was clear and he did not have to squint as he did.

It's Hannibal's car that's waiting, his stony faced driver betraying nothing as Hannibal holds the door for Will Graham, and keeps a wary eye for the press - but no one is looking for Will, and Hannibal's court-declared innocence had taken the eye off of him for a little while. Money in the right pockets had rendered him a victim that deserved to be left alone.

And then they're on their way home, with Hannibal settled and concerned in the seat next to Will, as they head for his apartment - the very same where they'd spent the first night (and many since), discovering they could be companions as well as enemies.

Will sits quietly, squinting through the glasses that sit familiar against his face. It's bright outside, and the air tastes different. He's getting a headache from not wearing his glasses for so long but he lets it throb, reminds himself he's alive to feel it, reminds himself that the car is taking him away, and that the man next to him promised him protection.

The trip doesn't appear to take long, but Will has spent so many hours of so many days deep in his mind that perhaps he just blinked and missed it. He tries to ignore the look the doorman

gives him, he knows the man's name, has stopped to talk to him multiple times since he'd taken the position offered, and before his entire world was taken away by a black bag. It's both humiliating and terrifying being out so open when he's so vulnerable, but he lets Hannibal lead him to the lift and leans against the back wall quietly as it ascends.

The apartment is as he remembers it, clean, barely used and lived in. he'd gone here multiple times in his mind for an escape and found himself a little disappointed that his desperate mind had added details that weren't there now; the two mugs he'd leave steaming on the counter if he woke first, the way the curtains would shift in the wind if he ever threw the windows wide. It is still, now, and silent, and Will wants nothing more than to be allowed to wash, to get himself clean and back to feeling a little more human, and then resting.

As desperately as he wants to know how Hannibal can get him out, get him away, he's willing to wait one more night for it.

It's as still as Hannibal had been, waiting. He had felt the lack of Will's presence, even though he'd known the man was winding up to strike him like a viper. He had hoped, right up until the last second, that he could turn Will over into his following. It had been holding his hand out with just a little too much that had gotten him bitten in the end.

This time he had rendered William unable to hit him. It was a loss he had weighed carefully, something that Hannibal felt acutely. When Will moves back into the space that had felt surprisingly empty without his presence, when he steps in like he remembered exactly how it had been as well as Hannibal did, Hannibal feels like he's let out a breath he wasn't aware of holding.

There was time for a bath and tea, there was time for a lot - probably more than Will expected right now, but instead, Hannibal reaches out to pull him back into his arms gently. He doesn't know if it will feel quite the same as when Will had put himself there willingly and easily, after everything he'd been through.

"I'm sorry," he says, genuinely, because he is. That's not a lie, only just.

Will allows himself to be moved, where he can see Hannibal approaching, and rests against him. He's tired, and the warmth is welcome, especially in this familiar place. He isn't sure how he feels about it yet, their relationship had always been a dangerous and rocky one, always filled with some sort of doubt or walls that neither man refused to surrender even when coherency was no longer an issue or requirement. And now, after everything, he doesn't want it again.

He doesn't want to remember or linger. He wants to wash, rest, thank Hannibal in any capacity he can, and disappear.

The words are soft, and a surprise at how genuine they are. Will isn't stupid enough to consider the entire kidnapping to be completely above both Hannibal's knowledge and hand. He doesn't answer for a long time, just breathing instead, letting vague ideas and plans run through his mind before sighing and twisting away.

“May I wash?” he asks quietly, rubbing his hand over his face, for a moment forgetting his glasses are in the way, “I may be more tolerable company if I wear my skin as my own again.” and I’ll be more coherent so we can discuss the plan for leaving.

"Of course," Hannibal surrenders his hold on the man with some reluctance, and he will give him his privacy to see to himself. He doubts that it will be an entirely pleasant experience - but the water here is warmer than anything Will could get at his own apartment, were he still to have one.

He settles his hat on the coat rack, and moves into the kitchen, leaving Will to see to himself. He knows there are a number of sharp excuses for self harm in the bathroom, but Hannibal is confident enough in how deft his touch had been to not believe that Will is any great threat to himself - in fact, Hannibal is positive that even when he knows the whole of how the cage has closed over him, that he won't feel compelled to it then, either.

Instead he puts on the kettle and waits for it to get hot enough to sing, making peppermint tea that would soothe without threatening his stomach should it be sensitive. Then he waits, and drinks it, and considers how much more full the apartment seems when Will Graham is present within it. He listens to the water run, to the sounds of faint splashing as the other tries to scour the last weeks out of his skin and hair and from under his nails.

Hannibal wonders if he'll come out feeling anywhere near as clean as he looks.

For the first few moments, Will takes his time turning up the temperature until he hisses at how hot it is. But he needs it, it’s such a juxtaposition to his cold, dirty skin, that he needs the reminder that even decadence hurts, that, in fact, it hurts far more than poverty. He lets the water cascade down his back before raising his face to it. His muscles uncurl from their painful tension slowly, but until his legs start to tremble from holding himself up so long Will doesn’t make the move to start washing himself properly.

And when he does, it’s vigorous. Almost violent. He scrubs his skin until it’s pink from the temperature and the pressure he used, until the water flows clean and the steam around him smells of nothing but water. Only then does he take up the soap and wash the rest of the memories away, watching the suds slide lazily down his arms, uncovering bruises and grazes, mottled purples and yellows of handprints over and over in a kaleidoscope of pain. his legs are worse. He assumes his back is too. His chest suffered less, nothing beyond bruising and the occasional graze, but no cuts, no throbbing welts. He was usually tortured face-down.

He washes his hair over and over until he can run his fingers through it without catching in tangles. He forces himself to not notice how most of what he washes from his hair is blood, not dust, it will only make him feel ill. When he’s clean, he doesn’t leave the shower, letting the heat make him dizzy, soothe him and bring blood to the surface of his skin until he’s sensitive to even the slightest breeze over him. then he turns the water off and steps out.

He takes his time to dry his hair, to dry himself, and borrows the razor by the mirror to shave. He doesn’t meet his eyes in the mirror, doesn’t let them travel higher than his top lip, he doesn’t want to see how dead he looks now, after however long he’d spent in that hell. He finds his old toothbrush in the drawer and cleans his teeth twice, until the mint hurts his gums. By the time he’s done, the steam has dissipated and there’s nothing more he can

distract himself with. He takes the robe hanging on the back of the door and wraps it around himself tightly, placing his towel on the hook in its stead.

The apartment feels more welcoming when he enters it again, and he makes his way to the kitchen where he knows Hannibal will be. Without a word, he takes the chair opposite and curls one leg up to his chest, resting his chin over it as he regards the man carefully.

“Much obliged,” he says quietly, the tension between them palpable in that Will doesn’t know what to expect from Hannibal anymore. He is far beyond pretending, far beyond needing to, but he doesn’t outright ask him, not yet, about getting away.

There is a moment, while Hannibal is listening to the shrill of the tea kettle, where he wonders if there ever was any reality in Will Graham. In all their time together, if any move had ever been uncalculated, or had resulted in something he didn't quite expect. Hannibal knows there were moments for him, that were dangerously close to real. Perhaps that was part of why he was fighting so hard for someone who had thrown themselves wholeheartedly into destroying him.

He passes Will the hot tea, sweetened with only the smallest amount of sugar, and takes in the shining pink skin, even the lips scoured free of their chapping. The carefully shaved face, and washed hair. He leans back against the opposite counter and allows the knowledge that this is his work to pass away out of him, as useless as it is pointless.

Will Graham is wearing Hannibal's robe like a comforting shield, as he'd worn Hannibal's coat over his dirty, naked body - when he knew that at the back of Hannibal's apartment, up in the loft where the dresser sits, or in the closet amongst all the others, there are his own clothes to wear.

"Of course," Hannibal says, his voice low, his eyes dark. He looks at Will as if he'd never expected to see him again, and swallows. He turns quickly, as if he couldn't bear to look much longer - and he couldn't, but because he wanted to get this just right, and with his downcast eyes and clean skin, with his expression gone and perfect, Hannibal wants him. He wants to rouse Will and wake him into only Hannibal's hands, to ground him with where he is and where he would be, but he doesn't.

"Can you eat?"

Will knows the tone, now, perhaps, more intimately than he’d like. But he knows it. He remembers it from before all this, only now instead of making pleasant shivers skitter over his skin, it sends cold tremors. Vestigial, no doubt, easy to wipe away later, but the thought it still there, that Hannibal is seeing Will, now, not as a business partner but something far more fragile and vulnerable. Something to take. He swallows.

He is hungry but his stomach is roiling, a confusion of emotions and exhaustion. He takes the tea carefully and cradles it in his hands, smiling a little at the fact that he knows that Hannibal knows that he dislikes peppermint tea, but that he will drink it regardless. And he does.

“Perhaps something small,” he suggests, not wanting to inconvenience as much as wanting to move onto more serious discussion. “I can build up to a proper meal. Eating little may be

beneficial for a time anyway.” Trying to smuggle himself out of the city would not allow for lavish, delicious dinners for a while, if ever again.

Hannibal had suspected his stomach might turn over at the thought of food after so long running on nerves and the barest nourishment. He thinks toast will be the best, warm and comforting and should it come to it - easy to throw up. Soup won't hurt either. Hannibal turns the stove on, and begins working - the process is simple - stock, the remains of a roasted chicken from the ice box, egg noodles. Soothing. He leaves it mild and uninteresting on purpose, but is careful to get a little extra salt in - he knows those will likely be depleted.

"I wasn't able to get a direct answer from anyone for a while," Hannibal reveals, as he stirs, once the toast is set unbuttered in front of Will. There are strawberry rhubarb preserves if Will likes, but Hannibal trusts him to know his stomach's limits better than Hannibal can guess at them. "My hands were somewhat tied until I was released from custody."

He doesn't sound angry about it, just tired. For once, he doesn't watch Will, just what he's doing. "I was told you were dead, that I didn't have to worry about you anymore that you had vanished after failing the FBI and maybe it was their hand that had taken you."

Hannibal sighs, and looks back at him. "They want you in jail, William." Perhaps simply for the embarrassment that the case had put the FBI through, the media circus afterward. Perhaps because they thought William had sold out truly, body and soul - and maybe he had, in a way he was lying to himself about. Hannibal was hoping. "If you're alive."

Will listens but doesn't respond, looking despondently at the toast in front of him before holding it gently by the corner and taking a small bite. He chews but can't seem to swallow. His mouth dry in a way tea couldn't correct as Hannibal kept talking.

So this was the equivalent of a spy being sent out into the cold. Will remembers being coached on how to suffer interrogation, how to burn his files and in what order, how to hide and where but now... the FBI wants him jailed. The mob wants him dead. And yet the one man he has wronged above all others is keeping him safe.

"If I'm alive," he murmurs, repeating the words in a hollow, thoughtful way. "So why not kill me?" He glances up and returns the toast to its plate. "Extradition from Europe is a bureaucratic nightmare. Kill me here. On paper. And smuggle me out." He tries not to make his words biting but fear makes Will lash out, much like a cornered animal. "You wrote the book on it, after all."

Hannibal looks back at him, turning around from the work with the soup, and he leans back against the counter and looks over the expanse of the island where Will is and he says nothing in words, but his eyes are soft and sorry in a way they almost never expressed. William had been above begging for such things, before all this. Now he had lost that, and all he'd stood on. Not even his rock, Jack Crawford, would fight for him now.

He waits for the proposed plan to sound itself all the way though in William's mind, waits for him to poke his own holes in the idea, and for the hope he'd had that things would be that simple to deflate a little on Will's features. Hannibal looks disappointed at the jab, but he allows that it was true and perhaps that he deserved it.

"William," he says, and his tone should say everything. How could he do that and expect to survive, himself? One did not reward enemies with freedom and expect to continue surviving - enemies lost fear. Underlings lost respect. The chains came apart, and without Hannibal in his position to hold it at bay, William would be killed. He could only run so far so fast. "Have I not taught you that in our family, one must own their mistakes?"

Will's expression is murderous for a moment, perhaps more, before the cold hopeless terror takes over and it melts to something pathetic, something weak and small, something Will has refused to allow himself to become, with the cuff around his leg, and is now finding difficult to keep pent. He is going to die. Whatever help Hannibal is offering it isn't something Will can see benefiting him at all and it terrifies him. He suddenly has a childish, instinctive need to live.

He'd realized about a week in – as much as he was counting days without the sun to keep hours accurately – that he was being tormented not for what he did but because he could be. If they wanted to torture him for being a fed, for attempting to put away one of the most powerful men in Philadelphia – if not the east coast – they wouldn't have kept him alive so long; Will had done enough research on the mob to know they had creativity in abundance but not patience. Which is, perhaps, what had made Hannibal so unique to him.

But they had kept him, alive, force-fed, healthy enough to stay conscious and feel everything. Because they could.

"I fear inevitably I have become mine." He murmurs finally, eyes finally looking away from Hannibal in a soft half-blink of heavy lids. He sighs and closes them. "Is this my last meal?" he asks, irony underlying his tone even as the fear makes it tremble, "Figures they'd let me out for that."

"No," Hannibal says, and he sounds surprised, artfully so. He is still relishing the transformation from the darkest look he'd yet seen on Will's features into a soft sort of resignation to his death, while at the same time refusing to go down fighting. When the soup is warm to the point of steaming, Hannibal ladles a portion out for Will, into a shallow bowl, and he draws a deep breath to explain himself. Carefully.

He reaches out across the island and settles his hand on William's shoulder, angling his head downward to look into his eyes. "You're safe if I own you," he says simply. "If my revenge appears creative and serves as a warning. You're my mistake William, and I have to make an example of you, but it's also how I can keep you alive."

His. Here. Alive. He draws up straighter. "Of course if you'd rather try it the other way, I can attempt to make it look convincing, but I will have to send everything I have after you. You have already injured my position, If I allow you to destroy my standing..."

Hannibal's mouth twitches - he would drop to the bottom, without discipline. There would be a war to fill the void he left, and the results... no one might like it. Hannibal, of course, would never allow it to happen. This was a crucial point, and he knew it. He wishes it were easier to resign himself to what he would have to do if William refused him.

It takes a lot for Will to not twitch away from the hand on his shoulder. And were he more coherent he'd perhaps praise himself for the fact that he stays still. But all he can hear is the white noise slowly filling his thoughts, following Hannibal's words and keeping them determinedly inside, refusing to let them out, let them escape and let Will breathe.

"Own me?" he asks, and his tone is a mixture of incredulous, angry and ironic, and here he does pull away, brows furrowed and lips parted in disgusted disbelief. He's panicking but trying to cover it with anger. Anger is easier, anger makes sense, but all Will feels is cold betrayal and a nauseating urgency that pushes his instincts to accept, to just nod his head and take it.

I don't want to die.

He shakes his head, straightening his knee so both feet are on the floor again, to run or to ground he isn't sure. He swallows and it's a thick painful thing, and his fingers grip the chair tight to keep himself steady.

"Why?" he asks finally, voice quiet, catching, "Why do you want to keep me alive, Hannibal, I tried to ruin you!"

He lets his hand fall the moment William stands out of it, and leans both of them on the marble countertop, putting his position in the disadvantage by the rounding of his shoulders, by how he has to look up at an angle now to meet Will's gaze - as if he were being perfectly reasonable, and William was the one bucking out of control. In some respects, that is the case.

It's the last question he doesn't expect. Incredulity, yes - a lashing out against him, yes. Perhaps violence, even. Perhaps flight, but not a demand for a reason. He'd run over the rejection, the outright flight (the worst scenario, Hannibal admitted, because he did not want to kill Will Graham, or he would have already.) He'd run over relief and crumbling thanks in his arms in a wistful sort of way, but never this demand.

He answers with the truth - or at least as much of it as he knows, because properly the answer was that he didn't. He didn't know why he hadn't crushed Will Graham earlier, before this spiraled even this far. He didn't know why he held out so much hope that he could own the man, that he could sit him down and groom him into exactly what he wanted. But he wanted that, and he had orchestrated what was, to his mind, the best way to get it. "Because I had hoped that not everything you told me was a lie, William."

The sound Will makes is close to a whimper, but his lips draw back as though in a smile. It's a desperate, weak, scared thing. And the smile falters quickly, to a confused, pleading expression.

"If you knew," he asks, pushing himself up to stand, leaning his weight against the table, "You KNEW what I was..." he isn't sure how to finish the sentence, why he even started it. He brings a hand up to cover his eyes and grits his teeth to keep quiet, to not break now, and it takes a lot. So much out of him.

"Hannibal, what do you want from me?" He knows him well now, surely he doesn't expect Will to just bow down, to accept this. But then again... he had before. He'd allowed himself to be taken, to be used and enjoyed that way and enjoyed it himself. He's shaking again, just slightly, and he lowers his shoulders just enough to be permission, just enough to ask for comfort.

He knew - he had known from the instant he picked Will Graham up out of the care of the two eager capos, bringing in something they thought was a nice fish, but that wouldn't serve his purpose to reveal.

"I knew shortly before you brought me to trial, William," he answers instead, repeating the name to keep the man grounded on him. To suggest that there is perhaps one person still in the world who would still speak it with fondness, even if it was the sad sort of disappointed kind. "But I had hoped..."

It didn't matter what he had hoped. Here it was at the head.

Hannibal moves around the counter at last and settles next to William with his back against it, lifts his hand onto William's shoulder and keeps his gaze down. "I'm asking for the same that I asked for before. Your company, your loyalty. But this time I'm asking for it to be genuine."

He tilts his head toward Will sidelong, to look at him over the contact, and he's the one asking here, the one making the request. After all of this, Hannibal is the one with his theoretical hat in his hands, asking William to let Hannibal save him.

Will presses gently into the hand against his shoulder but doesn't look up. Lets Hannibal's words wash over him. they are delivered so genuinely, so apologetically, and Will wants to believe him, he does. He decides not to bring up the fact that one can't buy loyalty, or devotion. Decides that in this context perhaps Hannibal isn't meaning it quite so literally. But he also knows that he can't go back to how they were, to what he was for him in the company, he'd be eaten alive, and Hannibal's reputation wrecked far worse than if Will was to attempt an escape – something he's still contemplating after rest.

So it begs the question…

"What does your ownership of me entail?" he asks instead, opening his eyes but still not turning to look at the man next to him. Hannibal, Will noticed early on, has a habit of using ambiguous words placed in just the right way to manipulate. A simple misunderstanding and the fault can slide off him like water off a leaf. Being owned by the man could imply anything from slavery to an odd sort of protection, one that is usually found in places like prison, where a stronger male takes care of a weaker one for his own needs rather than the other's.

As much as Hannibal is promising to keep him out of such a place, Will feels like he's about to sign a contract for something much worse. At the back of his mind, he assumes he knows what 'ownership' implies, here, now, and it terrifies him to think how that ownership will be expressed. If he's being made an example of, if his situation is to be presented as the alternative to death, he doubts it will be as simple as playing pet. And the thought disgusts him.

"On my end, it means I've extended my protection. Anyone who threatens you risks... my displeasure," Hannibal explains easily, carefully. "It means that I have exercised my right to design my own revenge, to the eyes outside."

Hannibal sighs, "It means that we must be very careful in the image we intend to present."

"You must stay near me, where I have influence. And in company, you must appear to be wholly mine. My colleagues would have preferred I left you, or killed you." He lays it out carefully. Hannibal had been content to do his own thing without the express approval of his colleagues before, but never something so risky as take a proven enemy back into his home. "But you'll be alive, out of prison. And you'll live here, as mine. I hope that's not so horrible a thought, William."

Will sighs, and holds his breath a moment, thinking. It’s not the thought that is horrible to him, it’s the loss of everything he is. The idea, knowledge, that he is kept, used, displayed… it’s more humiliating than the idea of rotting to death in a prison cell. At least then he’s anonymous. Here, his fate is known to everyone. Seen by everyone. And news travels, especially in circles like these. News will hit Quantico. News will hit his friends, the remaining family he has left. In a way, it’s the perfect torture, and Will makes a point to quietly commend Hannibal on it before taking another breath

He wants to fight it, wants to try something stupid like escaping, trying to hide in shadows as he makes his way perhaps three streets over before he’s beaten to death or worse. He wants to. His conscience tells him to. But his body is tired, his mind is too muddled to think of anything beyond how much he wants to accept this as good, how painfully he misses gentleness and being taken care of.

He refuses to say anything, but when he straightens up and shifts enough to rest his head against Hannibal’s shoulder, it’s answer enough. he’s given in.

The situation is carefully engineered to get them here, and the instant William relents against him is the moment of victory for Hannibal. But he gives no outward sign that he is anything but relieved, that he is there for any reason other than to comfort and protect William from the hell he'd just emerged from.

He curls his arms around the man, and remembers how the other had come into his arms so easily, of his own volition, when he'd pulled him from that hell in the bath house. Hannibal wants him, wants to assert what he has right now, but he knows the value of patience. He pushes his fingers very gently through the hair at the nape of William's neck, soothing.

"You should rest, William. If you think you can," he assures him, soothingly. "You must be exhausted." Hannibal doesn't ask him to relent verbally, doesn't ask Will to even acknowledge him yet, he just soothes and calms and is impressed with how well the man holds himself even still. He had always known there was a lot worth being patient for in William. "Come upstairs."

It doesn’t take long for Will to relax into the touch, to find himself sighing out against Hannibal’s impeccable suit, so put together and clean and just like him. doesn’t take long to turn enough in his arms to fit like he’s used to fitting, comfortable and warm and protected.

It’s a weakness Will is allowing himself to indulge in for the moment. He arches his back a little to feel Hannibal’s fingers further in his hair. He closes his eyes on a sigh.

He nods at the words, agreeing and accepting, but his hands do come up to rest against Hannibal’s chest and curl gently in the fabric he can reach. It’s not as desperate a hold as he had on the man just hours before, but it’s there, and obvious enough even in its gentleness. He’s tired, he’s just been told he will no longer be free again, the only time he will be allowed out is with Hannibal as his… object. A thing. and he’s just too damn gone to care.

He’ll lament on this later. Perhaps anger Hannibal with how he tries to stifle the crying, or perhaps just cry in the bathroom where the white noise of the shower will keep his sounds muffled. But right then, the idea of rest and sleep and warmth is what Will needs to stay on this side of a breakdown. And when he steps back to go as he’s been told, he tugs Hannibal along just enough to imply he wants him to follow.

That dangerous part in Hannibal moves again, suddenly and inarguably aware of how long William has been outside of his possession. Of how he wants desperately to reassert that the man was his, even though he'd had to surrender him for a little while to firmly drive William here, the man was his. Hannibal pushes his mouth gently against William's forehead instead, one hand curling in the thick terrycloth of the robe, his other fingers soothing through the man's hair.

As bad as his words had made it sound, the reverent way Hannibal is touching him is certainly one step above even how he touches his most treasured possessions. He is not touching William as if he were a thing, but - someone he is relieved to have back. Someone he's fought for, someone he's relieved to know is alive.

Hannibal follows after Will draws away to lead him out into the main office area, where he remembered William standing in awe of the city - it stretches now out in blackness below them, twinkling electric lights and the headlights of cars crawling around in the darkness below. It helps to remind Hannibal to be patient, to wait for what he wants - and that the results will be that much sweeter. They circle round the stair up to the loft above, where the wide windows have been softened with curtains that hang white and stirring faintly in the breeze of the one Hannibal has left open to keep the space cool in the summer evening.

Everything is made, everything is exactly how William had last left it, the evidence of his presence is strongest here, where not everyone gets to see. It always had been, since they'd first shared this space all that time ago. His clothes still occupy where they had been - perhaps returned there, or perhaps they had never been removed in a show of faith.

Will pauses, looking the loft over with tired eyes. it’s familiar and the thought hurts. It hurts to remember that before this hell there was a moment, maybe more than one, where he enjoyed this, where he was happy there. He closes his eyes again and his jaw works until he can breathe calmly. And that ache for comfort is stronger now, that need that Will’s been trying to quell to remain himself, even a little, even with all that’s happening…

He turns and finds Hannibal again, closer than he thought he was, just waiting behind him to let him take this in on his own, and this time he curls his hand in the shirt hard enough to wrinkle, enough to leave an impression, perhaps annoy the man if he wasn’t watching him so

carefully for any tick, any change in his demeanour from the anger and anguish of downstairs.

And Will is tired.

The kiss isn't a rough one but it aches. And it's desperation and submission and resignation in one movement. Will doesn't know what he wants. If he wants Hannibal to be the better man and step away, leave him, or to just take advantage and start this already. Start it at a time Will won't forget it, when it will be ingrained enough in his exhausted mind to reappear again and again when he's in a similar state.

There were days when Hannibal might have protested the vengeance wrought on his shirt, that it will need to be pressed again and drive him to change into something else for the day, but today is not one of them. Instead he finds himself pleased, and engaged in a way he hadn't been in a very long time. In nearly four weeks, and perhaps a little bit before, as William drew away from him, tried to sever what he could before it was cut for him.

Hannibal doesn't wonder for more than a second, as his arms settle easily around William's shoulders and pull him up, just as desperate in that second for this as William was to lean up and take it, if Will would have visited him in jail. Or would he have gone on with his life having successfully ruined Hannibal Lecter, and sat on that throne, stood on it to reach new heights?

Hannibal has ruined something that was growing and beautiful because it would have done the same to him, and because he has to own this, now. The kiss is hungry, open-mouthed and deep, and it seems to suggest Hannibal would take all of him in if he could, or perhaps that he wishes he hadn't had to consume quite so much of Will to own him wholesale as he now did. But he draws back before it goes further, lifting his hands and smoothing them gently over William's cheeks, touching gently until the other quiets.

"I did miss you," he assures Will, and then swallows. "Come to bed, William. We'll sleep."

The reassurance is so welcome Will finds himself quietly whimpering at the words. But his eyes are dry, he's too tired now, his mind elsewhere, to cry. At least he can spare himself that much humiliation for the moment. He keeps his eyes closed as Hannibal touches him and sighs, letting the lids open just far enough to see, and nods. He waits for Hannibal to step away before running a hand through his still-damp hair, noting with a strange sort of longing that it's longer again, the length it was when this had first started.

Will drops his hand and doesn't let his mind linger.

There are lights on all over the apartment and he's grateful. It's been a long time since he's slept with light at all – or slept, for that matter – and it's a welcome change. As is the fact that he'll be sleeping on a bed, getting a rest that he knows will be interrupted by no one save himself if his mind works too quickly to drop him directly into a deep dreamless rest.

Will unties the robe and lets it drop from his shoulders, leaving it where it falls for the moment, too tired to care that Hannibal may want it hung up or set aside. The sheets, too, are familiar, smelling fresh and cool against his skin as Will slides under the covers and rests on

his stomach, as he'd gotten used to sleeping. He sighs again, eyes at half-mast, and watches as Hannibal meticulously sets his clothes aside before joining him.

It seems like it must have been longer than it has been. Nearly a year, but how much has changed. Will has been a sort of whirlwind in Hannibal's life, and now, finally, he feels as if things are beginning to come back to where they should be - under his control.

He does not intend to allow another slip. He had tried trust, and it had failed him. He will have to try it a different way.

Without protesting the dropped robe, Hannibal begins the process of dressing down for sleep. His clothes go folded into the 'to press' bag, and he folds himself under the sheets afterward with a sigh, quiet, tired - but finally everything where it belonged in his life. He still reaches out for Will, however, to bring him close. He had never been overly possessive until he'd given the man up.

Now he wants the dimensions of Will against him, and he finds his hands wandering tamely - through the man's hair except where he winces at Hannibal's touch, over his neck where he follows the artery down, then the shoulders, where they are bruised and the skin shivers under his touch.

He won't let it happen again, no matter what the situation. Once was enough, and Hannibal found himself hating that he'd ever had to do it. Here is a fragile moment, however, and Hannibal wants him to know that touch - his touch at least, was still something good before he has time to fall into the habit of flinching away from it. Easier to never have to break the habit - easier to never let it develop.

It doesn't take long for Will to fall asleep, and it's only noticeable because his muscles lose their tension under Hannibal's fingers. Exhale, and he's out. too tired to even comprehend how quickly he let himself sink, with how much trust. But the fingers against him are gentle and familiar and Will calls up a pleasant memory to flicker behind his eyes and lull him to sleep.

When he wakes, it's still dark. Perhaps very early morning, perhaps he hasn't slept more than a few hours, but Will opens his eyes and surveys his surroundings in silence. He knows where he is, he remembers the night before – hours before, days… - well enough, and Hannibal's heavy arm against his lower back is a steadying, if somewhat possessive hold. Will holds his breath, shifts, eventually extricates himself from Hannibal and slides out of bed, near-silent. He'd developed the habit later in their relationship, towards the end, when he'd leave and dig carefully and silently through more records at night when Hannibal couldn't see him.

And now, he doesn't wake Hannibal either.

Out of habit, Will opens the closet, surprised but somehow not, to find his suits still hanging there, as though they'd never left. His clothes are folded into the shelves on the side, and he selects a pair of cotton boxers before silently closing the door, clothing himself, and padding downstairs. At the foot of them he stops, tightening the drawstring a little more. He's lost weight in the last few weeks.

It’s silent and cool, the windows enormous and letting in all the light the nighttime city has to offer. Will crosses his arms over his chest and frowns, a part of him still wondering how far he could get were he to sneak out now, to return to the closet, dress himself properly, leave the apartment and just vanish. Hannibal had trusted him before, with the key, with being alone in the place for hours at a time when he didn’t need him… he realises he’s walking only when he’s in the corridor and he pauses at the door, fingers gently sliding over the door handle and down, palm eventually splayed over the cool, heavy wood.

The locks were changed. All requiring a key from the inside. Will wouldn’t be able to leave if he tried. He closes his eyes tight and leans his forehead against the door for just a moment, breathing, fingers flexing against the smooth surface as though trying to let his freedom seep to him through it. After a while, he sighs and pulls away, hand lingering until it’s just hid fingertips against it then nothing at all. He makes his way to the kitchen.

He decides to brew the coffee. It’s the most silent he can be and he’s not sure he wants to wake Hannibal just yet. He sets the pot on the stove and waits, letting his eyes slip out of focus as he thinks about nothing at all. Then he pours his drink and moves around to the other side of the island, resting his elbows on the cool surface as his fingers cradle the mug.

Hannibal wakes to an empty bed, which he has been expecting. Then there is the familiar scent of coffee from below, the sounds of William in the kitchen being almost silent, but for the rattle of a spoon in his mug, for the running water to rinse it again. Hannibal stretches himself luxuriously awake, and takes up the robe that William had discarded the night before, pulls on heavy silk sleep pants against the cold, and wraps himself comfortably. He stoops to turn up the radiator as he moves through the dining room.

He pauses, however, to look at William while the man sits in silhouette against the wide windows that show the city beyond - dark and winking lights and William a patch of barely shaded black between. There is only the light in the hallway on, otherwise William has chosen to move about in the darkness, and Hannibal's interest wakes unexpectedly.

"Did you dream?" He asks gently, not yet moving. It has been far too long since William has been in his space, since he has moved in it with confidence and a familiarity that Hannibal found deeply appealing though he never would have admitted it. He feels it, tangibly, that he has lost that. But he has gained something in return, he thinks. He peers up at the clock on the wall - it is not yet three, there is a lot of night left. "Or did something else wake you?"

Will tenses but doesn’t react beyond that outwardly. Inwardly, his heart is hammering and he doesn’t turn, still caught making a sound in the reeking, dark room he’d been chained to. After a moment he ducks his head and takes another sip of coffee. It’s strong and bitter and Will hasn’t made the effort to make the experience pleasant for himself by adding sugar and milk.

“Habit, perhaps.” He tells him quietly, setting the mug down and resting his fingers in a steeple over the rim, “I rarely slept.”

He doesn’t apologise for waking Hannibal, certain the man had woken shortly after he himself had, and he isn’t feeling charitable enough to offer an apology. Not when he remembers how the locks had been meticulously changed, a few even added, on the door.

The trust he'd developed was long gone, but he wonders, for a moment, how angry Hannibal would be if he ever caught Will trying to pick his way out. he sighs.

"You changed the locks."

Hannibal finally moves, sensing the tension in Will, and knowing his stillness and predator's gaze will not ease the situation. He does not exactly want to ease it, not in this exact moment.

"It seemed kinder than guards," Hannibal says, mildly, and then, "You had my trust and proved that you did not want it."

There is a harder edge to the second statement, one that he does not seem to expect of himself. It's clear and obvious displeasure. Hannibal goes into the ice box and fetches out the heavy cream, but he puts no sugar in his coffee as he pours it - there is no second mug. Hannibal supposes there won't ever be. He stands on the other side of the counter, and puts his palms flat on the marble, the coffee between his hands and untouched.

"And I could not trust that you didn't give out my key, William."

Will glances up and meets Hannibal's eyes carefully. He left his glasses upstairs, unused to having them again, but he can see the man clearly enough, can sense the different emotions radiating off him in cool waves; the anger, betrayal, the genuine exhaustion and lust. Will can feel that almost drowning him as he sits there, opposite Hannibal, hand still steepled over the mug.

"I didn't." he says, letting Hannibal decide for himself if it's the answer to the first question or the second. And it's suddenly become a game, a silent fight between two men who had suffered in their own way for weeks. Neither move, but Will notices Hannibal's fingers press harder against the counter as he tries to rein himself in.

In the silence between them, Will offers only a small, knowing smile.

It's not because Hannibal had always had a plan that he is so angry, it's not because he'd had to carry it through. The upset comes because he had been so certain, very nearly every step of the way, that it was superfluous. That much as he knew what William was from the beginning, that somehow he was winning. That he was pulling William into his hold by choice, by temptations and lures and kindnesses that would have worked on any other man. He had extended loyalty and trust across the gap, so that William would see to extend it back.

And he had sat on trial before a jury because of it, and that thought still struck him coldly furious down into his center. He is not a man to anger - Hannibal's fury grows cold and slow in his belly and never has it reached quite so far down into him as this.

The motion that sweeps his coffee cup down along the marble surface of the island is exacting and calculated, it does not broadcast to his face, there is no jarring quality to its suddenness - simply, one moment the mug is between his hands on the counter, with steaming contents intact, the next it has begun to slide terminally toward the far edge, the hot liquid sloshing behind it as Hannibal completes the motion into a lunge.

Will isn't wearing any clothes to grab hold of, and Hannibal jars the points of his hip bones against the edge of the counter seizing him beneath the arms and dragging him forward onto the countertop. His mind clamors up the warnings that usually keep him even, that keep his instincts at bay - messy, they hiss, and unsanitary and what he intends will leave his counter filthy, but he ignores them as he pulls William forward and then presses him down into the spills of coffee that touch searing hot against his skin and cool quickly. Hannibal is far more powerful a man than his attitude conveys, and his hands pin William's shoulders down against the counter warningly.

In the moment of stillness, the mug finally impacts the floor at the other end of the island, and it shatters and rings in the silence, accompanied only by their breath.

Despite having expected this, having pushed Hannibal far enough for it, Will still protests, still fights it as he's dragged over and shoved down hard against the searing spilled coffee and the freezing marble. It's a familiar position and he stills reflexively a whimper escaping him despite himself. He presses his forehead against the counter and closes his eyes, teeth grit. The shattering mug makes his entire body jerk, the silence after witness to the residual shaking.

"Could've left me there if you wanted this," he says, but his voice isn't strong, it's not a powerful, victorious, teasing thing, it's scared and small and defeated. He won't beg him, he won't ask Hannibal to stop, but he hopes the man remembers his limits, hopes he takes into account the fact that he's been abused for so long and by so many before Hannibal found him.

It's in moments like this that Will believes that Hannibal is feared, that he's as powerful as he is because he got there himself, because he controls with both fear and trust, manipulation of the highest order. Another sound escapes him without his permission and Will digs his fingers into the unyielding marble until they curl into fists against it.

Hannibal just holds him, lets his mind do the worst of it as he pushes him down into the counter to remind him where he could still be. The sounds reach down deep in Hannibal and wake enough lust - an emotion he always indulged in the past, a sensation that never came against his bidding, but now here it was when it was disadvantageous, and at the center of that again was Will Graham, whimpering and twitching under him.

"I could have," Hannibal agrees with him, leaning his weight heavy over William's back, pushing his hips harder against the edge of the counter to ground himself with the ache. He could have left William there until he'd died, which might have been a far longer time than the man expected. He could have had him gunned down in the street as he'd left his apartment, or strangled him while he slept curled in Hannibal's protective embrace not an hour ago.

But instead, he eases the pressure a little, pushes Will flat against the countertop in warning once, before he lifts his weight and instead of taking, he gives, after the warning is established that he very well could be taking. He reaches under Will's shoulder and turns him, eases him on to his back, and hopes he will not fight. "If you fight me, this becomes real. I will keep my word. Don't force me to."

Will lays still, eyes wide and lips parted as he draws in air as quietly as possible. He nods, just once, and moves to get his arms under him, lifting himself up to rest on his elbows to watch Hannibal properly. He has his back to the light and Will can't make out his features, but the power is still there, the anger, the lust… and Will knows that if Hannibal so wants he will be back in that hell, or dead. so he doesn't fight him.

The marble is cold against him and his skin breaks out in goosebumps, he curls his fingers inwards to stop his hands shaking and just waits, the silence almost oppressive after the shattering porcelain and the scuffle between them. Carefully, Will draws his knees up, just enough to get his calves off the bench. He isn't sure if it's an invitation. His entire sexual experience with Hannibal, before this, has ridden on a mixture of adrenaline and expectation. It had never been dull. And every subtle shift, every small expression or quiet cry would bring about something new and perfect.

Will learned quickly, then, that being vocal meant a reverberating echo in the apartment alone, and no one else's business.

Hannibal sinks low over William like a crouched predator, his hands settling on the counter on either side to hold his weight and he finds that even after all this time, he knows William's particular scent underneath the last lingering remains of the agony, under the baseline familiar that is Hannibal's soap and shampoo and all of that layered over hasn't quite erased it. He settles his mouth gently, open, over the dip in Will's collar bone, and his hands close around Will's hips and slide him gently toward him.

He wonders, as his mouth makes a steady line downward, and he works the tie that William has pulled snug around his narrow hips, if the man will try to hold himself quiet now. If the sounds he had started, and then been endlessly encouraged to make, had all been part of his charade. Hannibal decides that's an uncharitable thought. He could strip him utterly naked, he thinks, but instead he leaves him the thin layer between them to remind Will that this was different.

He closes his palm, warm, over Will's cock through the material, and then his mouth with his eyes closing at last, when he is certain that William has resigned himself to this - and that is rewarded, carefully encouraged. Hannibal is gentle with his hands, and insistent with his mouth, drawing the band of Will's boxers down to contact bare skin with long, coaxing licks. His advantage is that he knows William intimately, he knows how to call out for a response, and here, as he turns and carefully applies his mouth to suck just under the head with a warm, wet pressure, he uses what he remembers.

And just as everything had been a whirlwind, it has slowed to nearly nothing. Will lets his eyes close as his head falls back, presenting his throat in a familiar submission, a welcome one. His breathing comes faster, a little louder, as the heat of Hannibal's mouth moves down his chest and lower, ignoring the bruises or simply avoiding them, Will can't tell. He makes a quiet sound at being touched again like this, legs spreading freely when Hannibal's hand settles between them, and then his lips.

Will's first instinct is to bite back, a knuckle pressed between his teeth before he registers it's there. He feels the skin there, thin, sensitive, covering muscle and sinew and bone. He feels it shift as he bites harder and then he lets it go, a quiet whine taking its place. In the weeks he

refuses to remember, Will was used. He wasn't touched or explored, he was taken, violated, destroyed. And this, with its undertones of similar ends, makes the sounds leaving his mouth turn weaker, submissive, desperate and wanting… wanting something back that he remembers, that he can replace the horrid memories with.

He rests back, arms loose at his sides for the moment, fingers flexing, head turned just so to see Hannibal, just enough. he draws his knees higher and lets them fall open, the cold digging into his back and shoulders a painful contrast to how hot Hannibal feels against him, how alive and real and permanent.

Focus is what Hannibal wants from William. He wants to draw him together from how he has been scattered, like picking up the pieces of the cup shattered on the floor, sweeping them back together and then painstakingly reassembling them. This control allows him to carefully leave out the parts that he no longer desires, but he does not intend to weaken the structure.

Hannibal reaches up as the hand comes away from William's mouth and takes it, smooths his thumb over the bitten knuckles once, and then curls their fingers together in an alternating, intimate line. He gives William an anchor to drag on, permission to grip and squeeze when it becomes too much. He gives him contact that considers who he is, rather than rendering him less than human.

Then Hannibal takes him deep into his mouth, as Will finally allows his voice freedom, as his knees twitch wider and lift, as his body responds in a way that was achingly familiar, and Hannibal realizes that he's just as affected. Every sound strikes him at his core and grips hard at him, pulling, sending an electric line down in a way that won't allow him to deny himself utterly - not this time. It's an unusual and dangerous sensation, to want this as much as he was trying to encourage in the other. He reminds himself, as he draws back and hears the altering in pitch in the low, nearly constant sounds, to keep his own focus.

The contact is unexpected and leaves Will spread thin, sounds coming freer, slightly louder, letting himself drown in the unbelievable heat as Hannibal sucks him down and holds him there, on edge, careful but dangerous at once; he can take this away as easily as he can give it and Will moans. He allows himself to test the bounds of this particular capture, sees if he can shift into the movement, if he's allowed to squeeze their fingers together, if he's allowed to wriggle on the benchtop as though to get away, if he's allowed to struggle with no intention to actually break free.

Hannibal pulls back and Will's sounds change, into needy, pleading things, low in his throat but heard, not restrained; they can get louder. He wants Hannibal to touch him, to take him apart like he'd grown used to, like he'd started to regret betraying in the later weeks before the trial. He wants, he wants, he wants… but he doesn't ask in words. He curls his body, arches his back, offers himself up, open and willing; the ownership Hannibal wants so badly.

He's spread wide now, obscene and wanton, and he doesn't care. Because this is what he is now, isn't it? Hannibal's? For his viewing pleasure? He remembers his words and thinks, perhaps, in this moment it is not quite a fate worse than death.

The shifting and sliding of William's hips is encouraged, gently. Hannibal's hand is curled up under one uplifted thigh to press his fingers at the man's hip, and they stroke, slowly.

Encouraging. Every time, Will presses their intertwined fingers harder together, Hannibal takes him deeper into his mouth again, and then draws back, but he takes every cue for his pace from the slow writhing, from the shifting tides of motion before he draws back completely.

It's the pleading sounds that draw from him as gentle reassurance, the shifting of his fingers to suggest Will isn't being punished - no, he is being very, very good and Hannibal wants more... wants to show Will exactly how much he will give him for the beautiful sounds that rebound off his kitchen walls, silent and private and only theirs. That he'll take the invitation that he's given - even though it may be his right.

He eases the boxers down over William's hips at last, stretching the waistband wide so as not to chafe him. Then he leans up, all the way, bracing himself over the counter and letting their bodies slide together heavily, and he kisses William's open, gasping mouth. He does it then, because much as the bitter taste of precum still sits heavy on his tongue, when he lifts his mouth and moves down again it's with a different purpose.

Their fingers curl together, still, but he has one hand to lift Will's hips and give him access to something lower. The first dart of his tongue is wet, slick with spit from working against the roof of his mouth, and then the next is with a heavy pressure, the hand curled under William's thigh by his hip is slowly pressing his fingers more firmly as he presses his tongue in firm strokes, unrelenting until Will's body does, licking until he's as open as his mouth and posture, until his sounds come unrepressed and ringing as loud as the silence had in the moments before this.

Will tries not to whine when the kiss breaks short, when Hannibal moves away again. But he shifts as directed, staying open and obediently still until Hannibal’s tongue makes him jerk and try to curl up on instinct. If anything undoes Will, it’s this. And ever since Hannibal learned this, one amusing, cool evening, he has used it to his advantage. If Will ever tries to resist, if he ever does so out of spite, or for a jest, a game, this will end him. if this had been interrogation, he would have broken.

He brings his free hand up to cover his eyes, the pleased whine a long, drawn out, low sound in his chest as he grits his teeth and trembles. Allowing his body to accept this, to enjoy it, mentally connecting the idea of ‘pleasure’ and ‘Hannibal’ together again, as though re-stitching an open wound. Will draws a breath and a loud keen fills the kitchen, brief and sudden and silenced just as fast. His toes curl and he tries to shift away, already close, and close to pleading for it.

Hannibal asks nothing for this, but he takes his dues - he could ask a dozen questions and get his answers, but he has enough of what he needs to know in the way Will's voice breaks out open and raw. He has enough surrender when the muscles shake and quiver against his fingertips.

He pushes twice more with his clever tongue, and the long extension, the way the bottom slides over his teeth and presses against his incisors when he applies pressure in long lapping motions feels strange and disused. Hannibal doesn't let it stop him, any more than he lets the thoughts of how unclean his own saliva is when it impacts the counter beneath Will in

rivulets. He could wet two of his own fingers and push them deep, but he doesn't, doesn't risk that he will still be sore and injured, and this is about positive association.

So instead he curls his fist tight around William's straining cock and strokes in long, firm pulls that won't be denied, no hint of teasing here, not now. This is still too fragile and still must be handled carefully, and Hannibal is glad that Will had defied him in the kitchen, where there was no temptation to slick himself with lube and take him anyway, gentle as he could.

The cry torn from Will’s throat now is higher but not as loud. His body jerks but he forces it still, forces himself to let the pleasure consume him, override all higher thought and everything in between as he endures and twists and strains to hold himself back.

But he’s tired, his body still weak despite convincing himself it isn’t, and Hannibal knows him too well for Will to be able to resist him. he murmurs his name, free hand dropping to bury his fingers in Hannibal’s hair, and turns his head, watching as his breath steams the surface before dissipating. Over and over on the smooth cold marble.

It doesn’t take long. Hannibal’s hand never slows, and Will comes hot against his stomach, fingers of both hands tight before relaxing in a pleasure-numb stillness. And it’s quiet again, the silence in the kitchen almost throbbing with the loss of Will’s needy moans and the sound of slick skin. now there’s just panting, quiet sounds escaping Will every few breaths as his eyes slowly close, lips parted and wet, body completely spent and tired.

It's satisfying enough that Hannibal loses some of his urgency as William tips over the edge with his name quiet on his lips, and Hannibal hoists himself again, and licks a clean stripe up Will's belly as the other catches his breath, before he draws back, soothes his fingers gently through his tousled, sweat-slicked hair in a reassurance, before he moves to the sink.

The cloth he uses to clean the mess is blissfully warm and reassuring.

Hannibal seems unable to keep himself from lifting his hand to brush over Will's mouth gently with his thumb, from touching almost reverently the evidence of pleasure on him. He smooths his fingertips over Will's forehead, and gently down over his eyelids. A promise that this could be as easy as it had been when they were both free, if William lets it be. The cage will only constrict when he thrashes against it.

He takes off his robe and offers it. "Will you eat now, if I make more soup?" He is concerned about Will's weight, about how quickly he had worn out, but the harm is not permanent. "Or should we consider returning to bed?" Hannibal's touches don't stop, simple, gentle, but his eyes have turned out over the city again, watching the lights, and the sky beyond. It'll be fall soon, the air growing colder and the leaves gone yellow and brown, but in the night it's crisp and clear, and from up here they can see lights for miles.

Hannibal has never been so little concerned with how much outside of his walls that he owned, as in comparison to how little he seems to within them.

Will allows the touches, relishes them, and finds himself seeking more comfort in Hannibal when the other turns his attention away. He wraps the robe around himself as he sits up but

doesn’t put it on, instead sliding off the counter to lean against it, pulling his boxers back on in a slightly stuttered graceless movement.

The city appears silent, the glass too thick to let any sound through, and it’s hypnotic, like watching a fire in the grate make endless shapes that will never be repeated. Just as this city changes with every beat of its steady heart that Hannibal holds in careful hands. Will sighs and leans against him, nuzzling into his shoulder, a post-coital, tired need to seek comfort.

“Bed,” he murmurs, feeling his muscles relax into heavy warm things as he steps closer. He just wants to sleep, wants to sleep more than a few hours where he knows he won’t be ripped from rest by a yank to his hair or a kick to the side. Will ducks his head a little and notices the mug fragments, surrounded by a cold, sticky puddle of coffee. Hannibal hasn’t made to clean it up yet, like a warning, a reminder. None of the fragments are moving now, the coffee simply reflects the city.

It’s an oddly jarring metaphor.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

In concept, it's simple. A proof of ownership, a deep humiliation that suits as punishment for the betrayal, for the public spectacle. Hannibal wouldn't deny the thought that the concept of the aesthetic was pleasing, as well.

Will gets a collar to help him settle into his new life.

Chapter Notes

Delicious collars and rope bondage ^^ oddly... not as cruelly kinky as it sounds. We hope you enjoy it though!

In concept, it's simple. A proof of ownership, a deep humiliation that suits as punishment for the betrayal, for the public spectacle. Hannibal wouldn't deny the thought that the concept of the aesthetic was pleasing, as well. It's a heavy black leather band, with chromed silver catch and buckle, with a ring that - since the collar was intended for a dog - could affix a tie or lead.

He had told the shop owner that he had a particularly large, untrustworthy dog. It was true, in its own way. The owner had suggested a series of harsh options - tightening bands of leather, some with metal points on the inside. A series of choke chains, a collar that turned blunted prongs in against the neck of the animal when drawn tight. Hannibal had suggested that perhaps even the idea of ownership would calm his animal.

But now, with the ring of leather held curled in one hand and down at his side as he lets himself into his own apartment and wonders if William will try to attack him physically for his efforts. He hopes his careful precautions have been enough to dissuade it. Behind him, he locks the door - there is no coffee waiting on the counter, no one in the immediate entryway, and there isn't any light on in the office.

He seeks upstairs.

It takes Will a week to get used to the fact that he has a bed again, and that he shares it with the same man he shared it with before. But the tension is there, sometimes thick enough to slice, built up with all the trust they'd broken in each other and refused to talk about. Hannibal left Will alone often, and every time he clicked the door closed and Will heard the lock slide into place, he would be at the door trying to find a way to pick it open. It was an

instinct he couldn't seem to avoid, the need for escape still flooding him when he was on his own.

Hannibal has not elaborated, since the first night, on what the ownership would be. Will still found himself free to walk the apartment if he wanted – he rarely did – free to eat at any time he wanted, enjoy the hot water if he so chose, and spend the night curled up again Hannibal as he had spent many nights before. But there's something different about the request this time, fringed with command like it hasn't been before. It's worrying and sends Will's mind into slow nauseating spins.

When he hears the door unlock he jerks. It's a reaction he's not yet been able to suppress, but he doesn't move beyond that. He's lying curled on his side in bed, head at the foot of it, and staring out the window at the world he can't actually reach. He wonders if the masochistic tendency should be noted or if he can't be blamed for wanting something he had – discounting the last month and a bit – for his entire life. He doesn't turn when Hannibal comes upstairs but his shoulders tense just enough for the man to know he's heard him.

Hannibal stands at the top of the tight spiral of stairs and looks into the space that used to be his alone. He wonders if he should ever have allowed anyone into this space, if he should have cut William out at the beginning and let it been kinder. He lays like a dead man, slumped and barely alive save the breath that rises and falls out of him as he looks down at the city below.

There had been victory in it when the man would come back to him out of choice, there had been an intoxicating feeling when William had been even partially his with the option not to be. He wishes he had more time on the other end of hell, but now all he has is what is left.

He crosses the space and settles down on the bed, a weight behind William, and he brushes the hair back from his neck gently - it's long again. He noticed that the man had eschewed his suits for something that hung less attractive and less constricting on his frame. Hannibal allows the comfort. He slides his palm warm over the space on the man's neck he intends the collar to occupy.

"There will be company tomorrow," he says, evenly. As it had been a hundred times in the past, though previously he could show off the man as a talented acquisition, he has no choice now but to display him as a humbled property. An example. His hand lifts, and he undoes the collar with a faint click of metal, the whisper of leather through the buckle.

Will holds his breath for a moment when Hannibal touches him before relaxing into it, tilting his chin up to let the man brush fingers over skin, a gentle if possessive gesture. He hums quietly when Hannibal mentions company. This will be the first time since the bathhouse that Will has been around for Hannibal to have company. He remembers vaguely that he needs to be present to be made an example of and it sounds so exhausting. He imagines sitting in silence, like a child chastised, and letting people berate him.

"I'll be sure to put on a suit." He replies, tone slick with sarcasm but serious enough to make it clear he understands. He's alive because Hannibal wants him to be. And he'll go to the dinner because Hannibal wants him to go.

The faint sound behind him makes Will frown and he finally turns from the window, eyes landing quickly on the thing in Hannibal's hands and he feels his heart hammer. He'd said ownership, he'd explained the reasons, but something so vile and blatant and humiliating as a collar? An actual physical collar? Will pushes himself up to sit and shifts back as much as the bed allows.

"I assumed you'd pull me around by the tie." He tries, deflecting and dry to distance himself from this.

There is still bite in him, which Hannibal finds himself glad of. He looks up with the strip of leather undone in his hands in a flat, promising line.

"I won't pull you around at all," Hannibal responds, with some amusement. "Not tomorrow anyway. I intend for it to look effortless on my part - it will help defer questions."

He isn't sure what Will is picturing, but he doesn't intend the collar to be an absolute horror. He supposes the other will take some time to see it that way. Hannibal reaches out, settles his hand low on the man's neck again, stroking the skin softly, before he takes up the collar again and begins to affix it in place.

"I don't intend to require a lead, but I would appreciate if you would tell me if you expect I shall need one." He says, adjusting. The leather isn't stiff - it's clearly new but it is soft and pliant, with some give. It's simple lines, clean and dark. It suits William.

Will allows the motion only because he's paralyzed with complete disbelief. Effortless? Their entire relationship had been the opposite of effortless, both working so hard to hide exactly what they were from the other, both working so hard to turn the other to their side. It had been work. Insane, exhausting work. And now Hannibal wants it to be effortless with a strap of leather rendering Will effectively subhuman?

He feels his breathing pick up and waits for Hannibal to set the thing in place before twisting away and getting off the bed, hands up behind him to tear the thing off. He finally manages, and throws it as hard as he can away from himself. It doesn't land far but the sentiment is clear.

"No," he says, and it sounds more indignant than angry, "It will not be effortless, Hannibal. You can't expect me to just wear it without complaint." He knows him, he knows him well enough to know Will would never go so easily, not with something like this. His brows are furrowed and he gives Hannibal a look as though he wants him to see reason again.

It needs to appear that way, but Hannibal had never expected it would be. He stands as Will does, but doesn't interfere as the other comes twisting to life to pull it off. Hannibal looks patient. He does not retrieve the collar, not yet.

Hannibal moves quickly, but not so fast as when William had driven him to anger the night of his return. He has mostly quieted that in himself, he has had to. He crowds William and backs him, plants a hand firmly on his chest and pushes him backwards until he impacts a solid surface firmly - in this case, the bookshelf.

"I can expect you to wear it and to help me keep the illusion that I am actually in control of you," he says, and his anger here is cold, old fury. "That I have rectified the mistake I made in letting you close enough in the first place. I expect you to help me keep the place that allows us both to have what we want - your life."

Will winces a little at the uncomfortable pressure against his back but doesn't struggle free. He knows the tone, he's heard Hannibal use it before, on people he has never envied. Having it directed at him is both unnerving and frightening. He swallows.

"You said stay close," he tries instead, "You want a show of control? I will let you, but you don't need that to make me. you can ask, like you used to, like you would a human being." He knows he'll lose the argument, that it's simply inevitable that he will end up at the dinner tomorrow with the thing in plain sight and most likely a lot more suffering on his end to have it there, but he can't just roll over and allow this to happen. He won't.

"I will be in company," he says quietly, "I will keep my mouth shut, stay docile and controlled. But I will not be your dog. You should have saved Winston if you wanted one."

"I am asking you for this," Hannibal says, even and quiet, his eyes locked on William's. He applies another moment of pressure. He can see the man rejecting the whole idea, steeling himself up to fight against it, and Hannibal supposes - of all the things, he can give him this. "All you want is an antagonist. Suit yourself."

He draws back and moves past William to move into the rest of his routine. He does not stoop for the collar, but steps around it on the floor and goes to remove his suit jacket, to strip himself down to shirtsleeves, because if there is going to be a fight over it, he'll be damned if he rips his suit. He also lets the deliberateness of the ritual, the implications of his dressing down, of removing his cufflinks, he allows it all to make a clear implication to what's coming.

It was what William wanted, something to fight and rail against. He wonders if it's boredom, or anger, or he still regrets holding the better part of his notes back at this point. Hannibal turns his cuffs back again and again, until they rest folded above his elbow, the lowest point of his newest scar in evidence on his left arm. He does not reveal that he has saved Winston - that he had seen the dog some weeks past while he still waited to retrieve William. He had lain in a similar posture on the terrace stairs of the Nantuxent house, looking out over the water the way Will looked out over the city.

But he had run for the ball when Hannibal had thrown it, and pushed the soft crown of his head under Hannibal's palm while Hannibal promised him a return of his master.

"This will end," he assures William. "It could be over before it starts."

Will isn't sure what this is about anymore either. He knows this will end badly, he knows, even without the memories of the way Hannibal could hold him down for pleasure, that Hannibal will beat him in this, will get what he wants out of him. but it's the thought that he's still fighting, still doing something more than being a trophy in humiliation, that makes him shake his head.

He can’t fight the man physically, he’s stronger, he’s older, and he’s far better trained to do it. but Will can resist him, can deny him what he wants, what he usually craves from him; all responses, all enjoyment. If Hannibal wants him hollow he can have him that way.

“You knew I’d fight,” he tells him quietly. “I’ve resisted you before, I can do it again.”

And it shouldn’t be so saddening, shouldn’t weigh so heavy on him but it’s not fully a lie. If he hadn’t resisted Hannibal this wouldn’t have happened, he would have left the FBI without a word and gone to him, but he didn’t.

"Look where resistance has brought us," Hannibal answers, in an undertone that is tired. They were at odds, in a way they had never had to be before. They had always resisted each other, always tried to keep reality at bay.

This time, when Hannibal pushes, it is gentler. He does not want to destroy William's resistance, he wants to instead encourage his compliance. Hannibal won't let this be about violence - there were other ways to accomplish submission.

Instead he lifts his hands and settles them heavy along the sides of William's neck and looks him in the eyes, and wonders if he will have to lay his terms. Hannibal pushes him toward the center of the room. He supposes a demonstration is better first. Hannibal crouches down. He still maintains the handcuffs they had put on him, he kept them more as a trophy, more as a suggestion to the futility of it. He does not fetch handcuffs, but instead a long length of rope.

He uncoils it as he watches William, waits to see how he will react and he knows the result will likely not be good. He remembers how he'd found the man.

"In the earliest days of the war, there were a surprising number of horses involved in it," he says, thinking back, as his fingers uncoil and uncoil, and then hypnotically begin to tie a sliding knot in one end. "It seems foolish sending mounted cavalry against a machine gun nest. Archaic. Barbaric."

Hannibal finishes the loop, and looks up at William, asking if the man will resist this, too - he supposes he will. "Fear would untame them," he continues, and his eyes are not unkind, but he has clear determination in him. "It was up to us to try and guide them back out again. It's like an arrowhead, you must push it through until it comes out the other side."

Will goes where he’s led but he can’t stay still when Hannibal pulls out the rope, not with the amount of times he’d been abused with one. Restrained with it, strangled with it, beaten with it… his breathing shallows and he shakes his head just slightly before stepping back and licking his upper lip nervously, bringing his hands up in a steeple against his nose, just under the frames of his glasses.

He can see that Hannibal will approach him as he had before, patiently, deliberately, and he will push until he gets what he wants from Will. And it’s not the idea of resisting that scares him, it’s the idea of what he’s resisting. It’s a slightly harsher trigger than Will anticipated and he’s fairly sure he will fight back, viciously, if that thing goes anywhere near him, like he’d fought before and got nothing but pain and harsh words for his trouble.

“Fear didn’t change me,” he says, trying to convince himself the words were true just as he was trying to convince Hannibal, “I just opened my eyes for a change.” He holds one hand up a little higher than his other, near his stomach, fingers splayed as though the gesture alone can keep the rope away.

“Thought you weren’t going to pull me around.” And it’s the same, weak attempt at humor to keep himself grounded.

"Closing your eyes to a change does not remove it," Hannibal says, and he keeps his tone calm, keeps his voice level. He approaches with his own hand extended rather than the loop of rope, and soothes it over the back of William's outstretched hand.

He runs his fingers further up the man's arm, gentle, quiet, and then he leans in to kiss William gently at his temple, as if he regretted what they were about to go through, but he was going to take them through it anyway. Out the other side, as he'd said, like the bullet had pierced his arm through and through.

"I'm not," he says and reaches down to ask William to pick up a foot, loop ready in the other hand. "On the contrary. I don't want you to move much at all."

It’s like a blade to the heart, that fear, and Will’s face contorts in an almost childish attempt to hide; eyes closed, lips pressed inwards, brows high and furrowed. He lets out a shaking breath and lets Hannibal move him, forces his mind to the initial idea of resistance, of simply not responding. He refuses to reach out to Hannibal for support, pulls his hand away from the touch, tilts his head away. Perhaps if he allows this, this humiliating, demeaning thing he wants of him, perhaps it won’t be such a surprise when he manages to pick the lock before Hannibal gets back with his company the following evening.

He bites back on the sound he wants to make at the rope against his skin, just lets out a long, loud breath through his nose to show his displeasure, and then he relaxes, lets his mind return to that numb place he kept it when he’d been restrained and cold and tortured. He wonders if this was what Hannibal had wanted the entire time when they had been circling, playing their games. Why hadn’t he tried it before? When Will would’ve been more than willing to participate and reciprocate? Why now when Will wants nothing more than to leave and forget?

He remembers the gentle way Hannibal touches him, how he almost caresses him to calm him, to please him, simply because he wants to touch Will that way. But he won’t turn into it, won’t respond. Play the lifeless thing he’s making him.

Hannibal closes the whole loop around the man's ankle, rather than just a single coil - it will keep the pressure from turning dangerous, from cutting off circulation, and he can hear the shivering, shuddery breath and feel how tense every muscle in the man's body is.

He doesn't want it this way, but if this is the way he has to have it - neither will he back off. He draws the rope tight around Will's ankle, and his other hand presses at the intersection of tendon and muscle behind Will's knee, seeking the pressure point, the reflex, that will bend it up, and then he takes William's foot from beneath him with the rope and bends his leg back up against itself, quickly working the loop, trying to take his balance - but not unbalance him.

Hannibal is there to lean on, if William likes, or his other option is to go down onto the floor. Either will suit Hannibal's needs. He takes a long loop and pulls it in a figure eight around the man's thigh, then back around his ankle, binding his leg deftly to itself, bent.

"You can stop this at any instant you choose," he suggests gently, mildly. "All you have to do is pick it up and put it on."

It's so unexpected that Will's hands come up on reflex to grasp Hannibal's shoulders, frowning and ducking his head to see what he's doing. The way he's tied makes it impossible to move, but, strangely, doesn't hurt him. It's a comfortable pressure against his skin, though a foreign one. He wonders if Hannibal will repeat the restraint on his other leg, and finds himself hoping he'll not topple when he does.

At Hannibal's words he just glares at him, eyes narrowing for just a moment before looking away. It's a hateful symbol he refuses to touch. And despite knowing that he will wear it tomorrow, that he will wear it until it's taken off him, Will refuses to take it willingly. He's too far from the bed to fall back against it to sit, and he doubts if he shifts to move to the floor it will be a graceful motion. He keeps his hands on Hannibal's shoulders, for support, and waits.

How much more of this will come to light? How many more things that Will is scared of, that Will finds unnecessary and depraved, will Hannibal reveal to him now that he has no choice but to stay?

He braces William and lets him hold, takes the transfer of the man's weight as he feels out the way his balance works now, as he feels for how to keep hold of his footing with only one leg and the other tied up awkwardly. Hannibal loops the tail end of the rope around William's waist, and then back between his heel and thigh, to take some of the weight and to create a fulcrum of twist should he need it.

He doesn't prefer it this way - Hannibal likes the simplicity of issuing orders and having them followed, of keeping a soft lead and a long line. As ever, though, he will use what he needs to to create a situation that he wants.

He straightens up, keeps the trailing end of rope - still a long enough length of it to do Will's other leg if he proves it necessary, and loops his other hand low around William's waist, pulling him close.

"Is it really so much to ask," he soothes, quietly, and with the rope still looped against his palm in case he needs it, Hannibal slides his fingers between them, and over crotch of Will's pants with a touch that's firm, but not harsh. "When we both know I could take far worse? Are you asking me to bring you down that far in their eyes?"

Would that free William from some of his guilt, for Hannibal to be the villain and tie him helpless and naked and simply leave him demonstratively while company came and remarked as if he were another piece of furniture.

"You're bringing me down enough." Will replies, and it's more an exhale than a word, and his eyes close for just a moment, a languid slow blind, before he opens them and they're no

longer on Hannibal's face. He knows he could do worse, he could do much worse, and Will is grateful for the patience and indulgence.

He doesn't respond beyond another slow blink when Hannibal touches him, even though it's such a familiar and welcome feeling, even though he wants to arch into it, let his body melt into the sensation. He swallows.

"You'll put it on me, you'll make me wear it, we both know that." He says after a pause, "But I won't do it willingly, Hannibal, I can't." He doubts it's easy anyway, he'd spent so long as Hannibal's golden boy, his prize to hone and market and show off, that the change to present him as an object, as something aesthetically pleasing, if that, will be difficult. The collar was too harsh a reminder of what he'd suffered.

"We'll see," Hannibal offers, but he keeps Will pressed against him, keeps his balance hostage and coaxes with his fingers as he watches William resist with closing eyes, watches him resist with his blinks like blinders.

Perhaps he would put it on William the first time, perhaps the second or third, perhaps one or two times more after that. It's possible he would put it on the man a hundred times, but he knows that there will come a day when William takes it in his own hands and puts it on, because Hannibal does not intend for it to be a wholly unpleasant experience - servitude to him, willing, was a softly coaxing thing.

Even now he is grateful that he does not have to use his leverage, does not have to further tie William up into himself. Hannibal keeps coaxing, keeps sliding his palm until he feels William's body respond and fill in his hands, until the fabric strains under his touch. Then he makes another loop of rope and pulls it tight around William's other thigh - tight but not painful. Enough to keep him constricted in the prison of his own clothes, to box his erection between loops and folds of fabric, before he continues to encourage it.

It gets harder to keep still, to breathe without quiet needy sounds wanting to make their way loose, so Will licks his lips and closes them, breathing through his nose instead. Hannibal has taken more control of his balance, keeping him upright and pulled closer, so Will lets him go, gives that temptation up as well, to grip and tug and pull Hannibal closer in a revealing submissive way. He won't give him the satisfaction. He drops his hands by his sides and clasps them into fists.

The pressure builds, and then he feels the rope loop over his thigh and down and it's so much more intense, so much harder to resist. His brows furrow, eyes clench tighter and he can't help the surprised and pleased gasp that escapes him at the feeling before he bites his lip and swallows all others. Hannibal has patience to play against Will's anger, has deft hands and soft words and that sweet manipulation that makes it easy to swallow and digest. It will be over if Will allows it, it will be over once Will admits it… it's his choice, always his, the blame is never taken by the man in front of him.

It becomes increasingly more uncomfortable to stand as he is and Will twists, tries to pull back and away, finds himself trapped by soft hands and the maddeningly slow caress between his legs. he doesn't want this. Doesn't want ropes to have this pleasure associated with them when previously they were nothing more than pain, he doesn't want Hannibal to coax him to

his hand, like had so many times before, with so many things. He doesn’t want to bend and bow and give this to him, and the more he thinks it and the longer he finds himself at Hannibal’s gentle mercy, the more he wonders if it’s really worth the stand, and worth resisting the pleasure he knows he’ll get if he just obeys.

He’s trembling again but he hasn’t said a word, not made a sound beyond the occasional intake of breath, but it’s harder and harder to do that, to keep that still and quiet. And who is the judge of how long Will must withstand before his point is clear, before his position is understood and accepted?

Hannibal waits until Will is shaking with the effort of standing on one leg, until his breaths gasp out of him over and over though he is clearly trying to hold down any other sign of his involvement, any other sign that he is enjoying this - that he does not want to is clear.That his body is responding to Hannibal is also clear - that doesn't mean he can't take himself away and deny Hannibal any satisfaction. Instead, when the man begins to shift and shake with the effort, Hannibal tugs the rope and steals his balance, but he has hold of him.

Guiding him backwards, he lays Will back on the bed, loosing the ropes just a little in how they're coiled - never quite tied, just looped artfully and then held with tension, to allow them to be loosened and adjusted as needed. It lets Will put the sole of his foot flat against the cover, rather than have the leg trapped beneath him - bent at the knee and held there.

He settles heavy next to Will, and sets about undoing his shirt buttons, and then reaching up for his hands - there is still some little tail of rope left, enough to tie his wrists to the loop around his waist, since he is doing nothing else with them anyway.

Hannibal wants Will to relent, but he wants him, also -to want it. It would be easy, simple as one could possibly make it, if Hannibal just pinned him down and forced it on him and gave him a target to hate - but he also knows that if he does not do this carefully, he will break what they have. As he loops the rope around the man's unresisting wrists and suffers the glare sent his way, he engages Will's mind.

"What's truly so objectionable about it?"

Will doesn't realize his hands are being tied until Hannibal is far enough through for Will to be unable to free them. Being allowed to lie down has made keeping his mind on not responding that much easier, but now he was bound and helpless and Hannibal was still trying to reason with him, as though Will were being unreasonable. His glare melts into a frown and then he just looks away.

"You're rendering me subhuman in front of a group of people who want me dead." he murmurs eventually, voice quiet but that little bit breathless, the tone it gets when Hannibal is close to getting Will incoherent. But perhaps now it's like that due to the amount of willpower keeping all responses at bay; for a while Will had simply held his breath to make it easier.

"You're painting me property, but you're also painting me a target. Something that, under your supervision, anything can be done to." he swallows and rolls his head back to not meet Hannibal's eyes but to look just above his lips, "If that's the case then at least show me the respect of not lying and telling me it's for protection."

There is no fight in his voice, but he's not rendered himself completely helpless yet, he can see how it's frustrating Hannibal that he's not responding to him, that he's simply letting something be done to himself - under Hannibal's supervision. A small smile quirks against Will's lips and he meets Hannibal's eyes for just a moment.

"It's been a while since you tied me up."

Sometimes all it takes is letting it out, speaking out the words. Hannibal listens, accepts, understands. He settles his palm possessively back over the bulging fabric at William's groin and feels how tight the fabric has stretched to hold him confined, as if he approved of how well William had filled the constraining space.

"I could allow them to render you dead," he responds, with an edge to his voice. He is not making Will a target, but laying a claim - William clearly sees it differently. The man cannot be seen to be going about his life unaffected, though he suspects the man has little problem with the thought of toppling Hannibal's empire from the inside.

"I have never tied you up," Hannibal corrects, tugging the rope just a fraction tighter. He works the tail end into a knot when he's finished with Will's wrists and makes sure it is safely out of his reach. His hands are tied low on his belly, anchored against it. He leans up over the secured arms and starts his mouth gently at the base of the man's neck, works his way down as he had so many times before, but he seems to want to refuse to grant him any relief by undoing a button or zipper on the man's pants. He must lift, and he pushes wet patches against the insides of Will's elbows on his way down.

"What you want me to say is that you will take it and like it. Very well," Hannibal says, his mouth hovering over Will's trapped cock. "You'll wear it when I say, and I will make it worth your while."

Will exhales, slow and quiet as he feels Hannibal's mouth against him, he twists his wrists just enough to test the knots, even though he knows he won't be able to slip them; Hannibal has never been that careless. Then he lays still. Still resolutely quiet, not shifting, trying to control his breathing. His words float over him in a hazy promise. It's a bribe, but it's also a negotiation, a trade that's being offered when Will had asked for one. It all somehow comes back to that, that Hannibal always manages to meet Will's demands by twisting the situation, leaving Will as helpless as before but not giving him exactly what he wanted.

Will swallows lightly and licks his lips before parting them to take a deep steadying breath. His body is fighting him now, aching to respond and receive more of what it remembers and enjoys. He is so stubborn, his mind still trying aimlessly to find a reason to keep holding back and coming up short. Nothing. And yet Will doesn't shift yet, remains still for the moment as though just resting and not tied up in elaborate knots and beautifully displayed. But displayed for Hannibal alone. His jaw works and Will closes his eyes before taking a breath.

"I can't put it on myself with bound hands." he murmurs, the anger evident in the undercurrent of his otherwise calm and logical tone. He hates that he's lost, it's another victory for Hannibal in a series that he's certain will add up. he knows this, they both do.

The answer, in words, is what Hannibal wanted to hear. He sits back at last, looking over his bound up prize, admiring the work, and how the ropes hold him, even through clothes. No, Hannibal supposes the man can't put it on with bound hands. Hannibal rakes his eyes over the display again.

"I'm not ready to untie you yet," he says at last, but he at least reaches to finally give him relief in one area - carefully working the bulging zipper so as not to catch on skin beneath, and insinuating his fingers into the open fly of William's underwear beneath to finally free him into his hand. "But I accept your surrender."

For now, he licks lightly, teases Will's cock with his mouth, and occasionally turning to wet the man's proximal fingers just as teasingly. He wants to push him toward the edge but not yet bring him over, leave him hungry enough to perhaps raise his voice again, to forget that he is holding back on some other point.

Will bares his teeth in annoyance but the look falls flat when Hannibal touches him and the teeth release on another sigh, this time a low hum accompanying it. It feels good and familiar and very welcome, and Will doesn't surrender completely yet, still holding back enough to be infuriating. But his breathing is coming heavy now, difficult, and more often than not a quiet sound comes with it. He lets his eyes slip closed, unable to move any part of his body but his free unbound leg and his head, and finally allows a moan.

He curls his fingers to try and catch more of Hannibal's mouth, to hold him there. He's unable to touch himself, completely bound to Hannibal's will for the time being, and surprisingly, once he'd voiced his surrender - hateful though it tasted - he finds himself relaxing into the bonds, almost enjoying the way it pleases Hannibal to have him this way. He shifts his hips up and voices his frustration when Hannibal deliberately moves back. He's playing him, like a musician well aware of his instrument and just what sound to get from it. He's had months of practice, and Will has had months of enjoying his submission to him.

He closes his eyes and tilts his head back, enough to curve his back just a little off the bed under him, lips parted on labored breaths and a quiet, delicious little moan of want. Will bites his lip and it goes down an octave, still quiet but lower, deeper, vibrating through his chest in a pre-emptive promise of more if he gets something in turn.

There is a moment where Hannibal regrets binding him with his clothing on, and a further moment where he debates -

"William," he asks, his tone, light, before he pauses to close his mouth over the head of Will's cock and push his tongue against it suggestively, before he sits back on his haunches and finishes his question. "How attached are you to this pair of pants?"

It's not the sort of careless spontaneity that Hannibal is usually prone to - but William makes such a picture, and his fingers are curling and trying to get hold of Hannibal however they can to encourage him, he is finally easing into the ropes, finding them stabilizing instead of restraining. Hannibal doesn't wait for the answer - though he expects to get one, before he transfers his hold around Will's length into the man's own hands - his movement is limited, but he can keep himself hard while Hannibal sits up and watches, eyelids almost closed all

the way, as he finishes removing his own shirt and seeks out something from the dresser - in the top drawer where he keeps small accessories.

It's a Swiss knife; a small, red promise.

Will laughs, a quiet, genuine sound but he keeps his eyes closed when Hannibal moves back, licks his lips and takes his time to answer.

"They're not part of a suit," he replies finally, breath hitching as Hannibal encourages him to participate and his fingers go instantly to the base of his cock to gently press there, and to the head. There's not much give for more, but it feels unbelievably good and he assumes is good to look at if Hannibal's silence and momentary stillness is anything to go by. He allows his eyes to open a little and a smile to form. He won't elaborate on his answer, though he does wish, in part, that he had worn a pair that belonged to a suit, just to see Hannibal struggle with his own desire to see Will prone and naked in the ropes and the complete waste of suit slacks.

Will stills despite himself when he sees the knife, and looks away. He knows it won't be used to cut him, to leave thin but agonizing slits in his skin. Not here. But he still refuses to look, instead turning the movement into a fluid motion, rolling his neck, arching it, pressing his fingers tighter against himself before curling his palm to stroke just the head over and over in a gentle rhythm that brings slightly louder, more helpless sounds forth.

It feels very strange being undressed and bound at once, feeling the fabric leave his skin and the ropes press cool and slightly rough there instead. He doubts he'll have bruises but he's certain he'll have marks over his body from it, perhaps until the morning, or until he showers and brings the blood close to the skin's edge all over to let it fade at once. He doesn't shift into the gentle undressing, knowing better than to distract from something so delicate, but the way his body trembles suggests the want to, rather than the fear of something to sharp so close to his skin.

Perhaps he would not have risked the wrath of his tailor in such a case as to have encountered pants that were a part of a suit in this situation. In the tightest spots, Hannibal is certain the knife never touches William's skin - he slides his fingers in alongside the back of the knife to guide it. He cannot quite get the pants off of him, but he flays them back like layers of skin, and lays them open without disturbing the ropes.

The largest flaps that would hang annoyingly, he cuts away entire. Watching Will work himself with his hands, the limited movement allowed, him as the skin grows more and more bare to him leaves even Hannibal hungry for it. He folds the knife away again when he is finished, and William had not so much as felt the metal of it against his skin. As he sets the knife aside, back on the dresser, he stoops to recover the collar, without taking his eyes off of William for a second.

The result lay out for him is very much worth the cost of a pair of slacks, even tailored as they had been. Hannibal leaves his hands where they are, curled around himself, and instead takes advantage of his arch to hoist him a little higher off the bed and get a pillow beneath his hips, to bend his other leg at the knee and hip and push him open.

He does not close the collar about the man's neck, but he lays it over the bared skin loosely before he settles down between William's knees, and makes deliberate eye contact before he lowers himself - these two things, the surrender and the reward - are correlated.

Eye contact had developed early between them, strangely. Since the first time Will had waited by the window for Hannibal to come home and either accept his offer or reject him, he had made eye contact and found it returned. It was something he wasn't sure he enjoyed but it was certainly something he craved once it was started. It made shivers rake his entire body, he could see every emotion in Hannibal's eyes and could adjust his actions to fit, to create the perfect mix within them. Eye contact was intimate, special, something Will had missed and something he found he couldn't quite hold as long, not yet.

He barely blinks and swallows as he watches Hannibal shift. He looks contented, almost proud of the fact that Will doesn't thrash to shake the collar away. And Will doesn't, it's a fairly earned hindrance for the pleasure he's getting, and he'll be good. His hands still their movement and he swallows, sure he knows what's going to happen and certain he won't last long if he keeps touching himself throughout. That said, he wasn't told to let go. So he compromises, with the fingers hovering over the heated and dark skin.

The sound that escapes him first is like a wail, but higher. A shaking, weak sound, and he keeps his teeth grit for the moment, grounded, harsh in contrast to the relaxed and pliant muscles. His toes curl and he shifts his hips up again, gasping when his hands make contact again and he pulls them away, resting them in light fists against his hips as he bites his lip and whimpers in need.

This - that William is making sounds and arching even in the instant before Hannibal has even touched him, just on the promise of what's coming. The memories of how Hannibal has treated him before, brought him to begging and taught his body something that belongs only to Hannibal himself. This what his patience, his relentlessness has brought him.

He curls one hand at William's thigh but it's to brace himself, and his fingers fall over the ropes where he'd first bound up the man's leg bent, and tuck beneath them, running against the constricted skin beneath as he pushes his tongue against Will, in flat long strokes to coax him open - in short, flicking motions to make him arch and gasp, and drawing out long, slow traces with just the tip to pull William's voice forth in full.

Will can be astoundingly loud, when his mind has shut down in pleasure and he has no presence of self to find embarrassment in, and Hannibal exploits it - not often, but often enough to know what he's doing. He offers no help with any other contact, just the point where his mouth meets William's body, and his tongue pushes in unceasing sweeps against him - he wonders how long before the man gives in and takes hold of himself again in curled hands, and decides that with these artful loops of ropes - now was the best time to find out.

It's been a while since his voice echoed in the apartment, and Will allows a smile, despite how dark his cheeks get at the realization. He smiles because it's so freeing to be able to let go completely with Hannibal and know the man will get him through when his mind no longer forms coherent thoughts. This is the only trust neither has violated with the other. They came close, once, when their truths pushed against their walls so hard the bricks shifted,

but even then they did not fall. Not over this. So this trust Will welcomes, and returns in kind, with loud pleased moans and slightly quieter whimpers.

He moves his hips as much as he can and his muscles burn with the effort, it's rare he's held open in such a position for long. He draws the knee not bound up a little higher to match the other and twists against the sheets, ducking his head for a moment to muffle a word against his shoulder before rolling his head back until his hair fans out, damp and long, against the sheets under him. His fingers flex and tremble and finally settle again, stroking harder to make up for the gentle - if unrelenting - flicks of Hannibal's clever practiced tongue. He supposes, not for the first time, that if anyone ever found out how they function they would be surprised that Hannibal so often and so willingly takes the position of giving pleasure, not taking it. It's a control many take for granted, and Hannibal holds Will completely entrapped by it.

He's close, close enough for his sounds to rise in pitch and lower in volume, for his muscles to twitch in the telltale trembling, for his sounds to become the only coherent words he can form: Hannibal's name and pleas. He barely feels the collar against him, knows it's still there, just heavy enough to stay on its own despite the effort Will exerts in constant motion. It doesn't feel like a burden now, not right now, not with the way Hannibal is rewarding him for the humiliating surrender. And even that feels so far past that Will lets it go, lets himself go, with a loud cry and a keen as he strokes himself through it, continues to push his hips against Hannibal's lips until he's spent and shaking, aching for more but too exhausted to beg for the moment.

He will when his fingers aren't sticky and warm, languid now against his hips. His eyes are half-closed but he keeps them on Hannibal, allows his smile to stretch wider and a low single sound of a laugh to escape him. He stretches out his clean fingers, turns his hand palm up. A gesture to suggest he wants to touch, to pull closer, to thank and hold and give anything to. He wants Hannibal to kiss him, to drive him so close to the edge his mind gets filled with static.

Hannibal leans up and presses his mouth against the man's palm, softly, as if he were receiving the offering as forgiveness. He pauses for a long moment, and then sits up, eases the knot back free, and undoes the loops - only one knot and the rest coils, and it was all it had taken to bring William down to his knees so that he could see it wasn't quite as bad down there as he thought. He stands to slip the last line free of Will's ankle, and rubs the skin carefully when he's got it off, but there is little chaffing.

The slacks are a casualty he won't lament. Hannibal settles back on the bed then, and pulls William against him, reaching up between the mattress and headboard to dip out the container of lubricant. He can feel how easy and relaxed Will is against him, after his release, and yet still wanting - still pushing his hips up suggestively as they lay front to front on their sides and Hannibal soothes him with a promise, eases his own pants off of his hips, and begins working slicked fingers against Will to seek entrance - but he isn't rushing quite yet. There's something he wants, first - and he is curious to see if Will's scattered, hazy mind can put it together.

Eventually, he is sure that William will come to enjoy relenting - to enjoy obeying when he knows it will bring him something he clearly enjoys. He wasn't made for servitude, and Hannibal is somewhat apologetic, but he is gorgeous when he obeys as asked. He takes reward well, flexing without breaking, never surrendering entirely but he allowed Hannibal to take him nearly as far as he wanted.

"You're only mine," he assures, as he pushes for entrance with his fingers, and finds him so relaxed, so welcoming that he knows all he will have to do is slick him up just a bit. Perhaps it's response to what William had suggested earlier, that the collar would paint him as a target. "I won't let anyone else touch - let them look all they like."

Then he waits, twisting his fingers suggestively within William as his eyes indicate the buckle on the collar - he had said, after all, that the man would put it on himself.

Will groans when the rope is removed, stretching his muscles in slow delicious pulls until he’s lying taut against the bed, and then he relaxes. He watches Hannibal move, shifts as necessary to allow the shreds of fabric that were his slacks to be pulled away and discarded, and goes when Hannibal moves him. the collar slides off, having not been buckled on in the first place, and catches on Will’s shoulder before he even remembers it’s there. He brings it up to eye level and just regards it.

He can feel Hannibal watching him, even as he draws one leg up to rest over the man’s hip, even as his eyes slide closed on a quiet moan at the initial, not painful, penetration, he can feel the man waiting to see if Will will remember. He remembers. And he sighs, jaw working just a moment before he turns the collar for the ring to face outwards and gently buckles it up around his neck. And it still hangs like a weight, like something that could tighten without warning, but Will doesn’t struggle against it, just listens to Hannibal speak and pushes his hips down against his fingers.

It will be a struggle tomorrow, he knows, because tomorrow there will be company, and Will is expected to be the epitome of the guests’ impression of his servitude. He will struggle because he’s scared, because he still hates being made to do this, being forced and coerced and the idea that he did not come to this on his own. He leans in to kiss under Hannibal’s jaw and moans again when his fingers find his prostate and take a moment to remind Will of why he has one.

“How broken do you want me,” he asks, breath hitching at the end, and he takes a moment before finishing the sentence, “Tomorrow?” for your guests, for your image. He can feel the collar when he swallows.

Hannibal pushes his fingers against Will's prostate again, then spreads them wide to stretch and skirt around it as he withdraws his fingers. His free hand rests over the buckle and the back of William's neck, and he knows that this is a challenge, that it's the first time he's had to ask something not willingly given.

He's fairly certain it will not be the last.

"In truth, I want you unbroken, defiant, resisting...." Hannibal says gently, as he lines himself up, as he curls his other hand at the back of William's neck gently and exhales, begins to

push. He knows they need to see him at least once, they need an example - likely they would need it again and again, but Hannibal wants to hold his 'revenge' private - it is enough that he gets to keep Will. "But visibly..."

Hannibal sighs, pushing, until their hips meet. He turns his head, and almost nuzzles behind Will's ear as he holds, as if considering, and then he finally answers with some amusement in his tone, "Do try to draw the line at crying."

Will's lips are parted on low quiet breaths of pleasure as Hannibal presses in, finally ducking his head and exhaling a laugh against Hannibal's damp skin.

"I'll keep it to pathetic dry sobs," he promises, but when he swallows he's nervous still. It's an act, the same as what he started with when he came to Hannibal, an act for a person he wasn't, a person he never really wanted to become but had found himself filling the mold for nonetheless. In truth, he's scared of it happening again.

It's a lazy pace, slow and deep and satisfying and they're closer than they have been for a while. It took a few days for Will to allow himself to be touched beyond the gentle tug to get him to Hannibal's side at night – not including his outburst on the first night home – and even then there was still a tension between them, a wariness. It's refreshing to be this close again, this comfortable and intimate, and Will arches his back to press closer, hands mapping the muscles in Hannibal's back and gently tugging at his hair.

"You'll have my appreciation," Hannibal assures. It was an act, but Hannibal wants him pliant and his, not broken and uncaring. It was always more rewarding, he'd discovered, when it was William's choice. Surprising, at times.

Now, however, his tone has gone hushed and distant, and his fingers insinuate into the gap between collar and skin to be sure it isn't too tight as they move, and he leaves them there - a little space. Between Hannibal's touch and the collar, he can breathe.

He keeps the pace steady - not driving and fast but constant and deep, so they don' t have to draw too far apart. He lets his head fall back as William pulls his hair again, arching against him. It was a security that had been proven false in the past, that Hannibal had known was never really true, but he could not help but to feel in moments like this.

It builds slowly, and he does not rush it - not the slow slide of their bodies, or the sounds he can press from William. He curls his free hand slowly under the thigh Will has slung over his own hips and presses it up to open him further, to change the angle just so, and push relentlessly as he gets close. The two fingers under Will's collar hook in the leather and drag him in for a kiss then, only now twisting slightly, just enough for him to feel it, if he has presence of mind enough to do so.

Hannibal has to break to pull in air only in the instant before he goes over and succumbs, in a satisfying rush of pleasure that pulls even his voice from him in a low sound that impacts his closed teeth - but William is close enough to hear it, possibly to consider it a victory of his own.

For a change it’s not restricting, or suffocating, and Will moves willingly, opening his mouth and arching his neck more in submission as the pleasure sensors in his brain come close to overload again. Will smiles, slow and languid and satisfied, feeling Hannibal’s response vibrate through his chest until it expires in a breath. And then they’re quiet again, just resting.

Will doesn’t think about the company. Doesn’t think about the collar beyond letting himself feel it against his throat as he swallows, a soft possessive thing. It’s an inevitability he’ll grow used to, he’s certain. He shifts a little out of Hannibal’s grip and allows him to keep hold of the collar until he pulls it out of his grasp and stands, walking to the washroom and gently closing the door. He cleans quickly and returns with his hair slicked back in damp curls and a smile before crawling back into bed and regarding Hannibal over the crook of his arm.

“Are you looking for a new assistant?” he asks after a while, simply because he’s curious. In the time he was Hannibal’s assistant – and his accountant and lover – Will dealt with a lot of work, work that Hannibal is capable of doing but usually far too preoccupied to be. But he has yet to see someone else in the apartment as he had been, going through the ledgers and filing the accounts.

For once, Hannibal is simply leaning back and drifting, with eyes mostly closed, staying easy and relaxed on the bed while he waits for his turn in the bathroom. If he puts it off to a point past where William has already returned, it's because the other looks comfortable, and he has had a long few weeks. Not nearly as long as William has, likely, but still tiring.

He's soaking in the fact that the man is back in his life, and though it's changed some by necessity, it's still a welcome addition. Hannibal yawns, akin to a satiated great cat.

"Nnnn," Hannibal rouses his thoughts toward the question, and sits up at last. "No. Either the last one worked out so poorly I've decided against another, or so well I'm hoping he'll change his mind and come back."

Hannibal stretches up to his feet, and turns a questioning look back at Will, who is laying out on the bed and regarding him just as curiously. "I suppose I shall have to keep my own books," he sighs. "I still expect you to help with dinner."

Will watches him, a smile growing, despite the collar still being around his throat, despite knowing that he can't be the assistant to Hannibal he had been in his current position. He sighs and pushes himself up, on his stomach but resting on his elbows, as Hannibal stands to take his turn in the bathroom.

"I've been told I shuck scallops well enough." he returns, pleased that the conversation is again easy and comfortable between them. But then, sex did always have that wall-shattering effect on them. It was only later that the conversations started happening on their own, without post coital help. He wonders if they'll ever have that again, or if his own defiance, or Hannibal's need to control him will get in the way.

Will doesn't leave a second mug out for Hannibal in the mornings still.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“I give you control and you give me kindness.” It’s a question, rimmed more with awe than mockery.

"I could give you cruelty, if that's what you prefer," Hannibal suggests, and he pushes up firmly into the next thrust, his fingers curling into the collar briefly, but not so much as to do more than hint. "But then you'd hold all your thoughts from me. We are less divided when I'm kind."

It takes time. But all training does, really.

Chapter Notes

The final chapter for the Nice Work If You Can Get It series.

Thank you so, so, SO much, all of you, for sticking with us as long as you have, for the support, for the feedback... it's been a ridiculously awesome ride. And there is so much more to come after this, so if you liked Nice Work please do check out the other stuff we have posted.

Time moves on. Things settle. William fails to fully accept his situation, and Hannibal supposes he never truly will. It takes something to go from ferociously free to being kept, even in such a gilded cage. Hannibal is true to his word and when they are alone, William is, in certain ways, utterly free. The only change to the house are the locks, the only change to the rules are that he must remain present and answer Hannibal's beckon.

It's only when there is company that William becomes an example. Hannibal had made clear the intent of the collar - twofold, one to claim ownership in a way that was indisputable, not because Hannibal was jealous, but because he was protective. The collar reminded others not to upjump their position and think about doing Hannibal any favors. And secondly, it suggested humiliation to the public eye. It reminded others what it was to cross this man.

If Hannibal allows himself to appreciate the aesthetic of it, it's because there is something deeply alluring about the black slash of leather against the pale column of William's throat, barely visible under the shirt collar, but occasionally the shining silver hardware - just a ring, just what one might attach a lead to, real or imaginary - caught the light and drew his eye. It was enough, honestly, knowing that it was there.

He had become adept at sensing when William was wearing it - his whole demeanor seemed to shift, and he had fought it, fought it still sometimes when he felt the need to try and backpedal to freedom after all this. Hannibal, in fact, is intent to reward the man so handsomely every time he must collar him, he wonders how long it will take before the man wears it voluntarily - before he seeks it out and puts it onto himself.

William is stubborn. Hannibal supposes it will be some time.

It takes weeks for Will to stop counting the days until Hannibal changes his mind and lets him go. It takes longer to accept the fact that he is, essentially, with the man for one reason only. He thinks back, almost enviably, of the young escort Hannibal had used to visit before Will had thought it was such a clever idea to take his place. He hadn't gotten anything out of it. No information, no further infiltration. Just a heavy mass on his shoulders, the guilt of fooling the man and of fooling himself into sometimes believing he wasn't.

He hates the collar. He can't stand the piece of leather with so much passion it's surprising. But it's a hateful thing, a heavy, thick, cold strap pressing into his throat just enough to remind him what he is, deep down, to Hannibal, and just how much the man is making him suffer with his 'protection'. He thinks wistfully of his dog, wondering, hoping that when they'd come to take him away he'd been left alone, had run out into the city on his own. He had been a rescue mutt, he'd find a way to survive. It weighs heavily on his heart thinking that they could've made him suffer for Will's mistakes.

If he admits it, when he truly thinks about it, Hannibal has never been outright cruel to Will beyond one or two occasions after which he'd made Will believe he had deserved it. Sporadic but memorable punishments to keep Will in line. And it hasn't slipped by him that Hannibal makes an effort to reward him, to please him and pamper him, after he does something he hates without complaint. Such as wearing the collar in public. Or wearing the collar at all. And some days he craves that level of attention, when the four walls of the apartment start to drive William out of his mind and he needs something to distract him from the monotony. He's not so much a masochist as to push Hannibal into hurting him. But, occasionally, stupid, primal needs take over and he lets himself slip.

He knows where Hannibal keeps the thing, and the key to go with it. He'd nearly thrown it out one of the open windows in a fit of rage the first time he'd seen it and been told what it was for. He'd never attempted to since, the memory alone made Will want to curl up protectively and forget everything. But he knows where it is. And for a long, long time he stares at it, folded neatly in its drawer, before taking the damned thing out and carefully putting it on. Hannibal is out - he no longer takes Will to his appointments - but the way his schedule has been recently, Will suspects he can expect him home within the hour.

He leaves the collar under his shirt, though unbuttons another button for clearer visibility, and goes about the rest of his day, pulling down a book from the immense collection, and taking a seat at the kitchen island with a cup of tea to read it. He doesn't quite stiffen when he hears the key turn in the lock, but it's a close thing.

It's difficult for Hannibal to decide if he's satisfied with this - if this was what he intended when he first put the plan into motion. He is not the sort that makes a habit of looking back, but these days he finds himself doing it. He wonders, at times - usually when William is at his

most wild - what would be different if he had never taken the man under his wing and then wound him up, just to see him go.

But then he misses the man at his side during appointments and decides that even the initial humiliation of the trial, of being taken from the airport in handcuffs, was worth it. He can't have back what he had, but today he shrugs out of his light coat, and finds the windows propped to let in some of the fall air, smelling of damp and leaves. He finds William with a book at the counter, positioned to be noticed when Hannibal enters, and he smiles.

But it slides off his features at sight of the collar, taken up willingly and settled on Will's neck where it can be seen, an open invitation, a clear submit. Hannibal crosses the space and settles his arms around Will, drops his mouth, open, on the back of his neck, and realizes he hadn't even thought about it. It was instinct. He wonders if William knows by now exactly how much control he has over Hannibal.

Will's eyes close slowly and he arches his back a little, enough for Hannibal to see the effort and the offer. It's a pleasant feeling, being wanted. And there are days when Will can force himself to forget that he's owned, that he's property, and just let go enough to enjoy himself. Every man has a weakness. And that weakness can and usually will be exploited. Will isn't sure, anymore, if he's doing the exploiting or being exploited. He isn't sure where one weakness ends and another begins.

He rests his hands on either side of the open book - something about historical politics, if he'd even been paying attention - before rolling his neck enough to tilt his head back, present his throat more openly to the man. He's silent for the moment, no quiet sounds of pleasure or want, just quiet breathing and the feeling of Hannibal's grip growing a little tighter against him. He remembers, still, that feeling of absolute power when he'd offered himself and the man had accepted. The feeling of victory knowing he could get further than any other agent would because he had that power, influence, control over the man.

That's all meaningless now but occasionally the spark rises up for the want of control again and Will can't quell it. Like today. So he hums quietly and allows a smile, still otherwise silent for the moment, waiting to see if he'd be told what to do or simply explored for the novelty.

One hand slides up, slowly, and hooks two fingers under the band of leather, to feel William's pulse change. To feel the weakness given him, and Hannibal shifts, reaches down to turn the stool around with a shriek of wood legs on wood floor in protest, and he takes what's offered him.

He twists his fingers into the collar and gives only the faintest hint of his teeth along the man's bared neck, soft, not enough to hurt but enough to claim. Hannibal lets his fingers slide free at last, skims the backs of them down William's front, and down further, to brush the backs of his knuckles over the crotch of Will's pants.

"Come upstairs," he suggests, like an invitation instead of an order. The tone promises, suggests William will very much enjoy what he has bought with this gesture, and then Hannibal turns away quickly because otherwise they will never make it into the loft. He is loosening his tie as he goes, pulling the knot free in tugs that are impatient.

Will hums again, pleased, contented even, with the effect his submission has had on the man who owns him, but he doesn't reply. He'd refused to address Hannibal as anything but his name, occasionally his surname when feeling particularly vindictive. Occasionally curse words when even that hadn't sufficed. He'd been slowly trained out of the latter. But he never addressed Hannibal by any of the titles offered to him as options. He had made it clear that it would be a bigger hassle for Hannibal to make him than to just accept that he won't do it. He's certain, however, that if he becomes pliant enough he'll be re-educated.

So, without a word, he gets out of the stool and follows Hannibal, eventually overtaking him, to climb the stairs to the loft. He doesn't need to look behind him to know Hannibal is not only following but plotting, planning, letting his mind run dark and deep with possibilities now that Will has willingly given his control up for the duration of time the collar is locked on him.

Once upstairs, Will sits comfortably on the bed, arms out behind him, resting his weight on slightly bent elbows. He watches Hannibal approach and still says nothing, just lets his eyes rake over the body he will admit he adores seeing, lets his expression relax into something more innocent and younger. Eyes slightly out of focus, lips parted to breathe since it will garner a better response than keeping them pressed closed, he waits.

Hannibal doesn't take his eyes off William - affording the man courtesy of paying attention now that he has directly asked for it. He unbuttons his suit jacket, then the vest beneath, and folds both together. His sleeves get pulled back in four precise turns of the collar, and his cufflinks set aside in the top drawer of his dresser.

Crossing the space, Hannibal reaches across it and settles his hand wide just below the collar, appreciatively. He presses his mouth over William's open lips, hungrily, promising. His hands work the buttons of William's shirt, gentle, though when three have parted his hands slide beneath the expensive fabric and graze the pad of his finger, then the edge of nail over one of his nipples before he does away with the rest of the buttons.

William can't know what he's just bought by surrendering to it willingly, but Hannibal thinks he will like it, in the end. For now, however, the reward, the positive reinforcement. Hannibal sinks down at the edge of the bed, and reaches out to pull William forward to the edge. He pushes his palm over the grey fabric at the join of William's legs, and notes that he was wearing just the pants to one of the suits he'd gotten the man so long ago. He works the fly, and slides his hand in, still looking up, still watching the glint of metal at his throat as it works.

Will’s eyes are dark, watching Hannibal as closely as Hannibal is watching him. he opens to the kiss, eyes closing on a quiet, appreciative sound as he gives Hannibal what he wants, surrenders willingly for the first time in months. He moans when Hannibal touches him and lets his eyes open as he pulls back. It’s unnerving keeping eye contact as they are, but Will can’t bring himself to break it yet; it’s hypnotic and addicting and in this way they’re equal, one just as powerless as the other, and just as strong.

It takes a lot of willpower to not shift, to not rush. Willpower that has both been trained into him, beaten into him, goaded out of him, and something that, like the collar, Will is giving freely; a peace offering. He swallows, spreading his legs a little more as he’s shifted, arches

at the feeling of Hannibal's hand. And he wonders if his choice to seduce Hannibal had been purely a professional sacrifice or something else. There were moments, many, before ownership, before the trial, where Will felt happy, felt good about being near this man, with him.

But both men had been working so hard to twist the other to their path, to bend them and pull them, and offer every reward they could just to win; and neither had. Not really. Despite the leather around Will's throat and the complete control Hannibal has over his life, Will still thinks about escape, still stays up some nights carefully picking one lock, the next one, before his hands shake too hard to keep going. Hannibal owns Will's body, his reputation, but not his mind.

Not yet.

Hannibal knows his power is not yet complete, but he knows it is getting there, that he has pulled and shaped Will in the same way that he has been pulled into something new by the man in turn. Before William he had never allowed habit, had never indulged to the point of missing the physicality when he did not have it. There was something addictive about the man, something like fine wines or tobacco, and the taste of him left the desire for more.

Finally he breaks eye contact to focus more on what he's doing, which is completely undoing Will - he starts with the button, but only pushes the waistline of the pants down to have access. He slides his palm, turns his fingers and coaxes until Will is fully hard for him - and it happens fast with Hannibal's attention, he notices. It's a satisfying accomplishment. He licks a single, wide stripe up the underside, and then seems satisfied enough to rise from the floor.

He gets one knee up on the bed, and then reaches behind Will to curl his fingers into the collar and apply pressure until he bows in a line, until his back stretches and arches, and his other hand settles between them, where their hips are very nearly seated together, and strokes in slow motions that are more about changes in pressure than the motion itself. There is pressure on the collar, the constant reminder it's there to suggest that it's exactly why this was happening.

That if William just relents to the pressure, even though it's faintly restrictive and might make it hard to breathe, he will like the results.

Will's initial response is to struggle, one hand up to try and dig his fingers between the collar and his skin, the other gripping the sheets tight, worried if he were to hold onto Hannibal he'd hurt him. The look he gives him is a mix of a plea to let go and annoyance that he's trying this again. Because he has before, and Will had resisted every time. It's an unpleasant sensation, a dangerous one, and one that reminds Will of places he really doesn't want to revisit.

He makes a quiet, choked sound when Hannibal touches him and his eyes slip closed. It feels unbelievably good, and the lack of pressure suggests that Will will be begging, then incoherent before Hannibal lets him break, if then. And he craves it. Would beg for it if he could speak, pride be damned, pride was choked with the collar when he'd put the thing on.

But the pressure doesn’t relent, and Hannibal’s gaze doesn’t turn cold so much as shift very slightly from praising to expectant. And something in Will clicks. Something that for the last few months has been eating at him as he’s been brought down to his knees, physically and metaphorically, over and over and over again, in company and in private, in a relentless, solid teaching method telling him that’s where he belonged now. The change hurts more than the pressure does, than the promise of fear does. It’s the disappointment.

Disappointment of a friend in a friend, of a lover in a lover, a master in his slave.

And trembling, Will lets the collar go, eyes on Hannibal as he deliberately tilts his head back more and gasps in a breath.

The pressure is not so much as to injure, not so much as to close his throat, it is just there, just enough. And then suddenly, as suddenly as William bares his neck, it relents. He only feels it when he resists, and the instant he relents, he is free. He soothes, then, with his touch - curls his fingers tighter around where he's stroking, and the other soothes over his shoulders.

This is harder than the path Hannibal originally envisioned. It isn't what he wanted, but he has woken to the sounds of picks clicking in the lock. He has endured the endless resistance that he guaranteed himself by pulling William unbroken from the bath house so that there would still be enough of him to remain himself.

Hannibal lets go only long enough to push William up the bed, to let him lay back comfortably while Hannibal eases his pants off over his hips. The whole dynamic has changed, and he wonders how much further before it will snap. Hannibal has done pushing and shaping. He will instead begin encouraging.

While he lowers himself over Will, before taking his cock in his mouth, his hand dips into his own pocket, and his fingers emerge curled. Likely, with Hannibal's mouth attentive and talented working over the head of his cock, William will never notice.

It’s such a surprise that Will’s eyes widen and his breath goes for a completely different reason. He steeled himself for pain, for endurance, and then nothing. Just warm hands pushing him up the bed to rest comfortably, and then Hannibal’s mouth is on him again and Will moans, arms coming up on reflex to rest above his head as he arches more, rolls his entire body into Hannibal’s mouth and touch, craving, begging, grateful for more.

He wants to ask why. He wants to ask why Hannibal’s grip had lightened, why he had dragged him out in the first place, why he’d been so patient when Will had been nothing but disappointing, difficult… the next moan carries Hannibal’s name and he suddenly misses the intimacy they had before, the way they could be pressed chest to chest, tight against each other, so close they were breathing each other’s air as Hannibal thrust in shallowly and Will was on the edge of his reason…

And he lets go. Will lets everything go and lets Hannibal have it, have him, if just for the time. But he is obedient and he’s responsive and needy and everything he knows Hannibal wants him to be. At that moment, he could say jump and Will would beg to know where from.

“Please…”

How Hannibal had missed this, the soft, wonderfully responsive William, laying beneath him and letting it happen and feeling every moment of it. Feeling enough for both of them, wanting enough that even Hannibal could feel it in a way that he usually didn't. They had both learned something, he thinks, while Hannibal had taught him.

Hannibal wants him close and begging, but not broken. He wants him pliant and pleased - not sobbing and spineless. Tears were one thing when they were the result of something too good, too much - but they did not suit Will Graham when they meant he was frustrated and exhausted and ready to simply lay down and let the world deaden to his eyes.

Hannibal reaches up between the headboard and the mattress and recovers the bottle of lubricant that fits just so there, leaning across William's body to do so, and he turns his head as he does it and opens his mouth along the line of William's jaw and pulls his scent and taste and desperation, and promises, "I know. Yes." While he gets his fingers slick and warm and is sure to do it in such proximity that William knows exactly what the motions mean.

Will’s eyes are at half-mast and he tilts his head back to let Hannibal press his lips against the skin, mark him if he wants, tease him with the promise to if he doesn’t. The sound of slicked fingers brings color to Will’s cheeks and his lips quirk up, an expectant and pleased expression. He doesn’t touch him, though he aches to, and when he swallows he can feel the collar pressing close but not quite as restricting against his adam’s apple.

It occurs to Will that his undercover operation ran just over a year, if he included his captivity and where he was now, and it’s both jarring and sad to him that in his entire life the most fulfilling and pleasing relationship he’s had has been with this man. Because he’d given it time, because he had fucken worked at it, and had convinced himself over and over that it was for the cover, for the job, for simply more information and nothing else.

And for a while it had been.

But the way he’s writhing now, wanton and needy, and greedy, he doubts he’d be able to convince anyone. Not that it matters much, he’s here forever. But right now it feels good, and he can hold onto right now.

“What do you want me to do?” he asks quietly. he’s offered himself, that much Hannibal is taking, but he’s done so before, when Will was less than cooperative as well as reluctantly pliant. This is almost blatant permission to take more.

Hannibal closes his teeth once on skin, enough to bring up a faint pink circle that will fade quickly, but won't be forgotten quite so quickly, and then sits up to consider what he's been offered. Perhaps the words had altered his plans, and he sits on his haunches in thought as his fingers slide up the inside of William's thigh to indicate where he is going.

"I want you to tell me what you're feeling," Hannibal asks, and he pushes for entry with his fingers, stroking until William yields. "Direct with your voice if you'd like, but imagine your hands as tied."

He has done his best not to actually tie William where he can avoid it. He pushes deep and curls his fingers back toward himself, stroking, testing, and watching carefully the effects it has on William's expression - he is truly gorgeous when he is pleased, Hannibal has always considered it so.

Will twitches, used to the sensation but still surprised by how well Hannibal knows him and what he likes to manipulate him into certain responses. He can't bring himself to put scathing emphasis on 'manipulate' today, he doesn't want to. His fingers curl in the sheets above his head to stay steady and he gasps softly.

"Warm," he starts, voice soft and contented. Hannibal curls his fingers again and another quiet exhale escapes Will, "anticipating I may be incoherent soon." He slides his eyes open just enough to see Hannibal through and lets himself respond to his attentions, shifting around to accommodate, encourage, leave himself completely open and vulnerable.

"Starting to reconsider this being a fate worse than death," he murmurs after a while, a low moan interrupting his otherwise coherent words. It takes him a while – tightening fingers, eyes closed, teeth biting at just the corner of his bottom lip as his body tenses and shivers with need – "If they knew what you did to me…"

He's actually wondered, before, what Hannibal's colleagues thought of this whole situation. Obviously it was humiliating, it was demeaning and dehumanizing, but what did they think actually happened to him behind locked doors? The same as what happened at the bathhouse? Worse? Perhaps, in a way, that's why he'd always resisted when – the few times he had been – he was presented as owned. Because if he didn't resist, if he was pliant and accepting and willing, then the punishment wasn't a punishment but a reward.

Perhaps Will had learned, carefully, to keep face to save his own skin.

If William had learned to use pretext in his favor, to pull the long con and use what he had to get where he wanted, Hannibal has perfected the art. He must be very careful, and should his position have been any more tenuous, he wouldn't have the option he had carved for himself. He would have had to allow for William to be a loss.

But it would have been such a shame to lose this, Hannibal thinks. "They know. In whatever capacity satisfies them as functioning with the image I've built." Hannibal twists his fingers again, then withdraws and simply scissors them, feeling the stretch. Lending William a few more moments of coherency. It was why this worked, his image. Hannibal is still watching him attentively.

"After all, would you have believed it?"

He does not expect so. And as patient and calm as he was, Hannibal didn't do it out of kindness - not exactly, but appreciation for his results and understanding of how best to get them. He does it because he appreciates what he has cultivated, the sighs and shouts, the man's voice on his name. The sexual contact was a satisfying plus.

Hannibal is satisfied that he's left William slick enough, ready enough, and he applies another swath of lube to his hand, then his length, but he pulls William up over his lap, sitting, so

they are close as he guides himself and begins to push.

The angle is a surprising and pleasing change and Will drops his head back on a groan as he shifts, slowly sinking down to take Hannibal in. no, he wouldn’t have believed it. Wouldn’t have believed the man capable of owning someone with two completely separate faces, the outward one that suggested his property suffered, and the inner, in which he suffered at his property’s hands. And Will had surely put him through frustration with his mood swings and disobedience. He was, perhaps, training Hannibal as keenly as Hannibal was training him.

But not today. Not right now, when all Will wears is the thick black band around his throat and a sheen of sweat, clinging to Hannibal’s shoulder as he steadies himself. This feels reminiscent of better times, of safer ones, and Will relishes in the patience and the touches Hannibal lavishes on him. it’s slow, a building pressure and promise, and Will takes initiative to shift first, moving almost completely off before sinking back down, the sound escaping him much louder this time, fingers digging into Hannibal’s skin.

When Will speaks again it’s not quite as coherent., but he makes a valiant effort.

“I give you control and you give me kindness.” It’s a question, rimmed more with awe than mockery.

This was theirs, and the truth of it was for no one else. They carved each other into complimenting shapes, losing what was rough or extraneous like wood worn down on a lathe. Instead of lamenting the lost pieces, Hannibal closes his mouth on the bared line of William's throat, just above the collar, and pulls a mark up under the skin that is just as much a sign of ownership as the dark collar.

Hannibal curls one arm around William's shoulders, so he can lean his head back on it, and the other stays braced at Will's hip, following the motions that were starting slowly between them. He enjoyed this, as messy as it was. Will rarely held his voice when they were this intimate, and though he never quite got as loud as he did when Hannibal indulged other pursuits, there was something to say for the sound of Will coming apart right against him.

"I could give you cruelty, if that's what you prefer," Hannibal suggests, and he pushes up firmly into the next thrust, his fingers curling into the collar briefly, but not so much as to do more than hint. "But then you'd hold all your thoughts from me. We are less divided when I'm kind."

When they are moving in rhythm, instead of simply moving, Hannibal lifts his hand from William's hip and instead curls it around Will's cock between them, but he doesn't rush, he keeps his hold loose, attentive to any sign that Will is getting close, intending to draw him out.

It's a sharp intake of breath, nothing more. And it's less what Will prefers and more what he expected. He's adjusted his gallery of Hannibal's expressions to include the collar; the look Hannibal had given him when he'd walked in was not one that suggested they would be slowly coming apart together late into the evening. And yet, it's a welcome surprise, and Will tenses his muscles for a moment as he moves, a low moan accompanying the feeling. He feels the slight tremor run over Hannibal's skin that suggests he feels it, will remember. It's

rare for Will to coax a sound from Hannibal, even in the state they're both in. He's learned that too.

And it would be a lie to say that they are always divided, and always have been with the ulterior motives on both ends before the trial and now, with the conflict of interest regarding ownership. But there are moments, like now, like small, quiet snapshots of a previous time that Will still recalls on occasion when the weight of the apartment weighs him down during the day, where they seem to share a pair of lungs, a heartbeat. It's a beautiful and welcome thing, and Will curls one arm around Hannibal's side, ducking his head against him at the new onslaught of pleasure and this time the moan is louder, higher-pitched and helpless.

"I'm not thinking anything," he breathes, a promise or a reassurance, he isn't quite sure. But he's not hiding, not now. Not when his muscles burn with the exertion, the slow but unrelenting beat up and down against Hannibal and into his grip. It's a sweet torment and Will tenses his muscles again, harder, before sinking down hard and quick, pulling a cry from his throat, guttural and raw.

"Good," Hannibal praises, because while William had always suggested his mind was his most marketable asset - and it was, even to Hannibal - it also tended to hold him distracted. He clung tighter to pride and outrage at moments like this than he did to enjoying it.

Hannibal leans into him, so they are cheek to cheek, close, and Will's cry curls almost directly against his ear. Hannibal reacts, pushing up on instinct and Will is tight around him and his own surprised noise of pleasure would have drowned save how close they are.

Then it is not tender or cruel either, but urgent, with Hannibal curling his free hand up over William's shoulder to brace them together as he pushes up and closes his teeth on the muscle of shoulder and anchors himself to move faster, push harder, because they both know where they want to be.

It’s blinding and dizzying and Will responds, body relaxed into pliancy and tensed in pleasure in a rhythmic endless motion. Eyes closed and lips parted as Hannibal urges him closer, without a word, with only the occasional sigh slightly off hitch that suggests Will’s obedience is having an effect on him. The familiar sting of a bite has Will twisting, changing the angle, the sound escaping him lacking the air to become a fully voiced moan.

He is a kaleidoscope of movement, shifting, edging closer, presenting his body in any way he can when it’s pressed so close to Hannibal. His hands leave red tracks over Hannibal’s back as the heat in his belly grows heavier, as urgent as the movement to bring him here. And Will is usually above begging, has found himself sinking to it on occasion in jest or dark desperation, but it’s pleas that fall from his lips as his toes curl and back arches.

It’s a strange thing, but for all Will’s defiance, the collar holds him more captive than he’ll ever admit. There are rules associated with it that even without the slow, patient, deliberate training, or the harsh punishment for disobedience, that Will knows. Until he is told, Will is a toy to work in Hannibal’s fingers, writhing and suffering prettily for his pleasure. And Will just needs to know, wants to know, if he must endure or lose himself to be wound up again.

His next plea is a whine, drawn out and needy, and he turns his face against Hannibal’s neck in a desperate nuzzle for permission.

Hannibal feels him trying to hold back, asking with his touch, begging with the urgency in his voice even if it isn't quite words - and on a night when Will hadn't donned the collar willingly and come to him, he might have insisted he endure - but now he does not want to endure either.

"Let go," he urges, curling his fingers tighter just a fraction to mimic the pressure William was exerting on him, and Will looses his voice in warning, groaning and letting his nails catch on the skin of Hannibal's back as he claws for it, and then tips, and Hannibal enjoys feeling the transition from this close up, how his muscles go slack then taut, how William rides it out in surges like waves.

Then he loses track, too, and muffles his own soft sounds with his teeth closing on the leather of the collar and bearing down. For a moment, there's no separation, no weight of owning on either of them, just the shared heavy breaths and drifting, sharing heat between them in the cool.

Hannibal lifts the hand he's kept curled around the back of William's shoulders before either of them can really come all the way back, drawing two fingers down his shoulder and then lifting one hand away from his back, pulling and bending the arm until he can fold their fingers together, trapping something small and flat with intricate shapes that press suggestive into William's palm.

Will is boneless, body pliant and open and slightly trembling as he shifts just enough to separate their bodies before pressing close again. He can feel Hannibal’s teeth against the collar, just pressing the strap out of shape before letting it go. And then his hand is being turned, and Will lets it, ducking his head to rest against Hannibal’s collarbone as he catches his breath and watches the movement through half-closed lids.

What Hannibal presses into his palm feels familiar, and slightly cooler than his skin. and for a moment Will doesn’t move to examine it, just rests as he is, thumb gently rubbing over Hannibal’s where their hands join. But there is something in the gesture, something decisive, something almost painfully trusting, that makes Will pause, withdraw his hand, and look.

He turns the object over in his fingers, letting his mind catch up and understand what it is, comprehend the enormity of such an offer as the key warms to his skin. It’s trust, the most he’s been allowed since the trial, since before, a peace offering, and Will swallows, mind filling with the possibilities of where the key could take him, how far he could get. They knew he was alive, now, after Hannibal had made a point of publically presenting him as property, if he got far enough he could get help, could get out.

He knows Hannibal is waiting for a response, can feel him tense a little in anticipation, perhaps going through the same scenarios in his mind as Will is playing through his own and finding ways to stop him. Perhaps hoping that, for a change, Will doesn’t think. Just takes the gift and reciprocates. Will swallows and draws back, just enough to kneel comfortably over Hannibal, head ducked to look at the precious little thing in his hand.

“Is this freedom or a leniency?” he asks softly.

"Do you think freedom would still suit you?" Hannibal asks, philosophically - though he is still out of breath, and he has come to settle his hands on Will's hips as the man processes what he has been offered and puts it together in his mind. He can feel the minute changes in the man as it affects him.

"Either way, a leniency could be taken advantage of. I have heard you scratching at the locks, William."

Hannibal yawns, sated. "But I have also seen you don your collar willingly. I'm suggesting the two do not have to be utterly separate or mutual."

Tracing idle patterns with his thumbs low on Will's belly, Hannibal seems confident in his decision. In all reality, he isn't. He has a safety net in place, of course, but perhaps his cunning Will could slip through the gaps and when he was away he would decide to be done with Hannibal forever. Perhaps he would escape it all and never spare a thought to him again.

If so, William was a weakness he could no longer afford to indulge. Hannibal was safe from prosecution for a long while, at least. He could go on, rule his empire again with no distractions as he had before. He could perhaps quell this desire to possess something so utterly that he had never had before. He feels vaguely sick to his stomach at the notion of severing that part of himself.

Hannibal disentangles himself, stretching his muscles, and heads for the bathroom to clean up.

Will considers, running the flat of his thumb over the ridges of the key as Hannibal spoke. He doesn’t let himself panic at the thought that Hannibal had heard him try to break out, on some level he assumes Hannibal knew but chose to let Will stop on his own. The collar, however, is a surprise for Will himself. Still something he doesn’t consider becoming habit. He shifts when Hannibal moves to leave, and sits back, watching him quietly until he leaves the room – and Will – in silence.

Had the key been offered a fortnight ago, Will would be dressed and out the door as fast as his exhausted legs could carry him. Even a week ago, the thought of ‘should I’ would have seemed foreign. He turns the key and presses it against his lips as he sighs, eyes closing for a moment as he feels the shape of it imprint against his skin.

Perhaps the collar restrains him more than Will allows himself to believe. Or, a more frightening thought, the collar is simply a strap of leather now comfortably warm against Will’s throat, and nothing more. He hasn’t consciously made the decision to stay, it was forced upon him in the worst manner, but he can’t seem to consciously make the decision to leave. Not when so much trust has been given him, not when the experience itself has not been a fate worse than death.

With another sigh Will opens his eyes and turns to set the key on the side table with a click, fingers linger a moment too long before he lets it go and gets off the bed. He pauses,

stretching his arms over his head, standing on tiptoes, before running a hand through his damp hair and following Hannibal to the bathroom.

He thinks that at the very least, he would have had to get here sometime. Hannibal knows that now, there is very little resentment toward him at a base level, when William wasn't actively thinking about it. He knows that so far the cabin fever has not driven Will to start picking himself apart. It had come to be a fate better than death, but it could evolve again with too much time trapped indoors with only this to focus on. It was time to try giving the man his freedom, and hoping that he had done enough to coax him back to Hannibal's hand.

Hannibal is running a bath, seated on the edge of the tub, with his fingers trailing under the running water to be certain it doesn't get too hot. The electric heaters weren't as precise as Hannibal would have liked, but the luxury of hot water was worth the chance of scalding if one wasn't careful. At the very least, William had fulfilled one expectation - he had not run fast as he could get his clothes on for the door.

In a way that might have been too honest for him, to essentially look Hannibal in the eyes and leave. Instead Hannibal offers a half smile up at Will, a clear invitation to join him, if he likes. It's still fairly early, since William had interrupted the usual flow of the evening by presenting himself in so irresistible a fashion.

"It does suit you," he says, eyes first on the dark slash of leather, and then he looks up to meet William's gaze. "But not because it reduces you, in my opinion."

Will snorts quietly in amusement but doesn't yet reply, turning instead to look at himself in the mirror, frowning a little at the mark on his throat he knows won't be easily hidden by clothes. He draws his fingers over it, presses against it until the skin pales, then lets it go, the blood flowing back to the area darkening the bruise once more.

"What is it about my submission you enjoy so much?" he asks quietly, almost rhetorically, and there isn't a hint of loathing there, just wonder. He'd considered it was about power, power over a situation, over Will himself in retribution for what he'd tried – and ultimately failed – to do. But of late, Hannibal had not been treating him, not counting Will's moments of lashing out that needed re-teaching and punishment, any different than one would treat a partner.

The thought is just on the edge of unnerving, if Will wasn't so used to the dynamic.

He turns to Hannibal to hear his answer, using it as a gauge for how to approach him for the rest of the evening. He'd satisfied the man, and himself, enough to be able to just turn away and claim the need for rest were he so inclined. But he isn't sure he wants it over just yet. The fact that he had so much influence over the man's actions simply by donning such a symbol was in itself intoxicating.

"When you submit, you are finally mine. If only for a few moments," Hannibal suggests, mildly, standing up. He reaches out to brush the curled backs of his first two fingers down the curve of Will's spine, affectionately. "It's a close enough proxy for loyalty."

The answer was far more serious than he intended, and Hannibal pushes his fingers over the mark as well, to pale it again, before he turns away and settles himself in the bath. "And you become expressive when the burden of self-possession is taken away from you, in small amounts. You free your voice, allow yourself to receive what I'm offering."

Hannibal's smile warms, touching his eyes more than his mouth, and his tone drops. "You cry out my name."

If that's not explanation enough, it's all that William will get. Hannibal knew he was already aware of how much he could pull and sway him, of the changes William had already wrought, and Hannibal yawns again into the back of his hand as he settles deeper into the tub and tries not to think about how much more of them there seems to be in this last year. Nor, he supposes, of how it would walk out with William and only return at the man's leisure, if ever. He knows it is a when, not an if - the if comes in whether William will return - of his own accord or trapped like a rabbit in a snare and kicking until the noose drew up tighter around his neck.

Will considers the answer as he watches Hannibal get into the bath slowly and lay back in a comfortable recline, the ghosts of his knuckles still cool against his back. He supposes that's all the man would want, for him to be his for more than a few moments, to give in entirely, and on some level the notion is such a tempting one Will is not sure why he hasn't yet done it. Perhaps because Hannibal phrases it as loyalty, not as affection, and loyalty Will cannot give him.

He allows a small smile at what the man notices, what he seems to treasure more than the full control over Will's actions; his responses let loose and free to be expressed. That freedom he enjoys, for a while that was all the freedom he assumed he'd get, but with the key now getting cool on the bedside table, Will has the power and the 'freedom' for more. He doesn't miss the contemplative sadness that crosses Hannibal's face either, an expression that's shuttered but there, a vulnerability Will doesn't particularly expect of the man.

After a few more moments of pause, Will crosses the room to join him in the bath, stepping in carefully and settling between Hannibal's legs, back to chest, and dropping his head back with a sigh. The water is just on the right side of hot, and his muscles slowly seep their tension into it until he's as boneless as before, comfortable and warm against Hannibal.

"You've spent so long trying to buy my loyalty," he murmurs after a while, one hand moving to rest against Hannibal's knee, the other skimming over the surface of the water just to watch the ripples he can make, "You've missed what I offered instead." He doesn't elaborate, knows he can blame it on post coital bliss if Hannibal questions it cruelly. After another moment of silence he turns his head just enough to press lips against skin.

"Do I have a curfew?"

Hannibal considers for a moment how comfortable this is. Will is a warm and heavy weight against his chest in the water, enough pressure that he feels every breath in a way he might not otherwise. He must phrase things a certain way, must be careful even in private not to let himself slip too far. His business is a dangerous one, a bloody one if one judged by the streets in Chicago or New York.

He had been in Chicago on February 14th, almost ten years ago. Too much weakness, too many questions of control, and if one let slip - well. Hannibal was already slipped considerably. He kept things lucrative, but the moment the money stopped flowing, he knew he was in considerable danger. He had hoped William might succeed him - once upon a time.

"Not buy," Hannibal corrects, and he lowers his arms from the side of the tub, reaching up to very gently undo the clasp of the collar. It is such that it must first be pulled a little tighter to slide the tongue out of the punched hole before he can push the leather back through the buckle. It shouldn't get so thoroughly wet as a bath threatened - when it dried it would shrink dangerously. "Earn."

The next question pleases him, as he sets the collar aside, and then submerges his hands below the water to rest against Will's belly and pull them closer together still. "You may keep your own hours, as per our original engagement, but I would appreciate if you'd be certain to leave a note in the ledger. It would be nice to know when to start looking. And when you're out, you'll wear my ownership. It doesn't have to be visible, but if you're challenged by one of mine - it will protect you."

Will hums and draws a knee up, just comfortable for the moment to be held and touched. He wonders if once they're dry, Hannibal will insist on the collar again, they have plenty of time before evening hits properly, and Will can see he's pleased him with the gesture. The idea of leaving the apartment with the collar initially makes him stiffen, then smile, a low, inwardly directed laugh vibrating in his chest. If found, please return to…

"I assume I am bound within the city?" he continues, he has no intention to go further, not yet, but he asks nonetheless. He has no idea if the protection extends to all of the branches of Hannibal's business. He also knows that, ironically, it would be better for him to run into someone in the 'family' rather than the FBI. The collar meant nothing but a humiliating submission around them. He wonders if anyone still remembers that he was once their agent, the one who got close enough to bring this down before he lost everything. He wonders if anyone cares.

The warmth and fuzziness in his head is pleasant, and Will arches in a languid stretch before laying still again.

"Thank you." He offers finally. For the trust or the honesty, Will isn't sure.

"And the immediate surroundings, within reason," Hannibal agrees, leniently. Not everything is available within the city, and should William want a day out in the Rose Tree Park, or at the Reservoir, then he was welcome to feel a little more fresh air.

He runs his hands lower as William arches into the stretch, pushing stretched fingers low on his belly, down through the trail of pubic hair, and then over the inner creases of his thighs, intimately but not entirely suggestively. It's just to touch, appreciatively.

"I could see the confinement constricting you," Hannibal says at last, and he leans forward just a little, to settle his chin over William's shoulder comfortably. It's not the business that he is in, captivity - not truly. Perhaps no one would believe that he worked the greater good, though his methods were bloody and brutal at times, though a visible percentage of those

human souls he imported from the war torn and rapidly politically changing Europe wound up sold in servitude, or in the sex trade on their backs, the rest he loosed. Some of it was a mask, a defense in case his crimes were ever brought against him the way William had done, but some of it...

He had pulled thousands from concentration camps, using the Mafia's money as an excuse and lever. It was a cover, it was a mask that made him richer still, just another layer to the confusion that was Hannibal Lecter's motives. Covers for covers and masks upon masks.

"I have Winston," he reveals at last, to overcome a sudden urge to admit everything to Will Graham, the full extent of what he did and the many reasons why. It would feel a little like disgorging his heart onto the scales and seeing how his sins weighed against a feather. "The housekeeper at Nantuxent is quite fond of him."

Will stiffens, there's no other way he can respond. It had always weighed at the back of his mind that he had done wrong by his dog, that he had caused him horrific suffering either at the hands of the men that had taken him, or the hands of the cold city he had disappeared into. The news hits him a little harder than he anticipated it could and for a moment breathing is difficult. That combined with Hannibal's gently touching brings up an odd juxtaposition Will isn't sure he can define.

"I was worried they'd killed him for spite." He admits quietly, letting his mind mull over the news and accept it in time. He isn't sure if he wants to lash out in anger for Hannibal having kept that so long from him or kiss him in gratitude. A gratitude he realizes far outweighs the gratitude he felt when the man had rescued him. he chooses neither, for the time, but opens himself more to the touch, tilts his head back in silent offering.

"He was smarter than to be caught by strangers at least," Hannibal agrees, feeling the changes in tension run through Will Graham intimately. He had held the news for so long to keep a lever, to have a hold that William would not have expected. Now he surrenders it, like he had the key, and trusts the results. He does, after all, still have the dog.

Hannibal's hands just wander for a time, over the sensitive skin on the insides of Will's thighs, touching firmly and followed by the swirls of water moving behind them. He pushes gently with two fingers up under the hollow of his bent knee where the skin is soft and rarely touched.

"But he remembered me." Hannibal is slightly proud of that, though he wonders how much of it was how deeply ingrained with Will's scent he must have been by then, how intertwined. Perhaps nearly as much as now. He slides his hands to touch more directly at last, cupping his palm over William's groin to see if he'll rouse again so soon.

Will tries not to think about how telling that is, that Winston approached him and allowed himself to be led by someone he, in essence, had met only a handful of times. The dog had been a difficult teach when Will had adopted him, training, patience… very much like Hannibal's treatment of Will has been recently… until he had come on his own, and hadn't left Will's side since. Or, until he had been ripped from it.

He gasps quietly into the hold and obediently rolls his hips into it. His skin is still sensitive but not enough to make the touch unpleasant. He realizes he'd inadvertently been asking for this with everything from his body language to his unsaid words; a glutton for punishment and pleasure, it seemed. Though he had been denying himself long enough, the chance to fully give in and enjoy himself.

"He has an elephant's memory for faces and a nose for character." Will offers, "I'm surprised he hasn't tried to pick the locks and run."

It's ironic and amusing in equal measure and Will relishes the feeling. Perhaps he could. Could give in, offer everything for Hannibal to see, take the time to pick the man apart himself. Perhaps it would be worth it.

"I didn't need locks for him," Hannibal suggests, and he curls his fingers and strokes up once, as William begins to respond in voice and intent. "I fed him and he stayed."

The request is voiceless, for him to continue, and his touch is slow and steady, so as not to interrupt their conversation more than is necessary. He enjoys having Will boneless and responsive against him, already sated and twice pleased with information in his favor.

This is the fruits of what patience and guidance, reward in greater measure than punishment. Hannibal isn't sure how much of himself he's given up to accomplish it, either, but he has an idea of how much he's gained. "Was it difficult, when you chose?"

That would be some reassurance, that William had hesitated. "If I had more time, would I have had you then?"

It takes Will a moment to filter through his fuzzy, warm thoughts and figure out what Hannibal is asking, and he takes his time to think of the answer. He remembers how nervous he'd been, the fortnight before, when he'd found the evidence, the week before when he still hadn't called it in, the night before when he had… the nerves sat spicy and raw on his tongue and down his throat and he had done nothing to alleviate them. And they had been a different flavor than those suffered at his first interrogation in Chicago.

He had been nervous about losing it. The trust, the affection, the companionship. He'd grown used to the arrangement by then, to the routine, to the mix of business and pleasure – sometimes literal and very distracting – and he'd lost sleep over it. Had stayed up nights curled up and mapping the lines of Hannibal's chest with his eyes, committing them to memory. It had been a painful break from a comfortable and – by the end – genuine attachment.

"It took me two weeks." He replies, voice low and quiet, a hum of pleasure following the statement as he enjoys Hannibal's touches, "Between finding the lead and calling it in."

He hopes that is answer enough, because he can't give him more, he can't lie right then. It wasn't against his moral code to put the call through, it had been against his personal attachment and affection towards the man. Perhaps, in a way, dependence. Co-dependence. It had been difficult for that.

“You have me now.” He adds quietly. Now, when morality can’t be brought into this, when you have taken away the other half of the equation to leave only one answer. He had no FBI to fall back on, no choice but to be here, with Hannibal, as his possession, as an example to others. But he is inescapably aware that there have not been others. No other assistants. No other ‘appointments’. Now that the morality isn’t a factor weighing so heavy on Will he can’t breathe, he allows himself to let go in the relaxed lines of his body, in the encouraging shift to draw his other knee up and open himself more, in the complete lack of resistance.

Thinking back, Hannibal recalls that time. The tension, watching William war his conscience - at the time, he'd thought it was just him trying to wait for the hook to set deeper, for his case to be more secure... or perhaps trying to decide to give up his attempt all together and embrace what Hannibal offered.

"I have you now," he agreed, but he was holding on more and more loosely. He supposed he would always have to hold at some anchor, because without it, Will's morality might rise up again. This is not a kindness, but a selfishness. Hannibal has several, but none he pursues so intently. He keeps his pace slow, the pressure light, feeling Will harden slowly and completely in his fingers, his breath hitching pleasantly.

He would have rather had William then, but it doesn't matter now. He'll let it lay down to rest. There is only the future to tell where the truth was going to be, whether he actually had hold now. Hannibal has grown tired enough of not knowing that he will take the risks. Hannibal closes his teeth gently over William's earlobe, once, leaving an impression.

Will moans and moves again, slipping one hand under the water to slide behind him, moving down Hannibal’s chest until he can stroke him as well, the same, soft pressure and languid pace, with a strange angle that allows for nothing more. And they’re quiet again, as quiet as the water slapping against the sides of the tub and Will’s increasingly loud breath hitches allows them to be.

“In the entire time you were grooming me to be yours,” he stops, lips parted on a low groan as Hannibal takes his time to stroke the slit lightly before returning to his rhythm, behind him, Will’s fingers fumble to mirror, “You didn’t once think to try it my way? Leave this… get off on a low charge, alcohol distribution, a drug bust…” he shivers, curling in on himself just a little before turning his head into Hannibal’s warm neck.

He had had that idea himself, in his crazier, sleepless moments, when he was desperately trying to find a solution to both his troubles, to find a way to close his case, finish the investigation, but leave Hannibal relatively unscathed in the process. He had thought about telling him and facing the wrath, the violence that would ensue, had thought that words would get through to him if he used them but had found them dried up when he tried.

They were a mess of coercion and manipulation, but Will realizes he will never be able to testify against the man again. not willingly.

"Perversion?" Hannibal prompts an addition to Will's list, on a breath that rushes out of him when Will settles his hand around him in turn. He hadn't asked or demanded reciprocation, but he did appreciate it - in this softer way. His next sound is the first half of a laugh, and then he lets it fade. "Would you have accepted that, in your fervor?"

Hannibal would barely know what to do with himself. "Besides, my colleagues are dangerous to those they feel have betrayed them." Hannibal draws in a breath and lets it out as a pleasured sigh, the warm air stirring over Will's shoulder and then against the surface of the water in small ripples.

William does not even know the extent of what Hannibal does, then - Hannibal is convinced. It's not his job to educate him - to tell the absolute truth would change nothing, to tell a partial would seem a lie to make him seem better.

"What would I do, if not this?"

Perversion. Will has to smile, despite everything. Had he been perverted, in every sense the word implied? He removes his hand, pushing himself away just a little out of Hannibal's grip before turning to kneel between his legs instead, hand returning at a better angle to continue the gentle, warm rhythm.

"It doesn't matter," he tells him, and that's the end of it. For now. For however long before Will's curiosity inevitably slips again and he asks more, demands more answers, more reasons. But for now he is content to lean closer and kiss him, free hand dripping water down the back of his neck as he grasps the hair there, to hold him still or just to hold him is something he'll leave for Hannibal to decide.

It doesn't matter because inevitably they will always be at the impasse, always in a tight spiral of good versus its opposite, and never hit another chink in the others armour. It doesn't matter because there is no future for Will outside of this dance, however long it lasts before Hannibal chooses retirement and pulls Will with him into obscurity and silence. Oddly, he thinks by that point, he will be very happy.

This is the point where they are doomed to meet over and over and impact until they sheared enough off of each other to finally exist comfortably.

Hannibal can let it sit at that, because Will is smiling and suggesting it no longer matters. Not at this moment - perhaps not again for a very long time. Or a short time, knowing how Will's mind went at him against his better interests at times. Hannibal surrenders his hold as Will resettles himself.

He draws his own knees up along the sides of the deep, clawfoot tub to allow Will room to settle there, and curls one hand around the back of his neck to lean up into the kiss, which they share for once instead of fight over, and he thinks that perhaps this year they could retreat to the Nantuxent house a little earlier than they might otherwise, and escape summer in the city altogether.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!